

The Gospel of Mark

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Chapter 15

Mark 15:1-2

*Early in the morning the chief priests with the elders and scribes and the whole Council, immediately held a consultation; and binding Jesus, they led Him away and delivered Him to Pilate. (2) Pilate questioned Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?" And He *answered him, "It is as you say."*

The Roman government did not consider blasphemy a crime for that was only a religious matter but high treason could not be ignored so the Sanhedrin led Jesus to Pilate. It is ironic that Jesus never tried to raise a political rebellion and that is the charge against Him. Pilate asked Him if He was King of the Jews and Jesus said that it was as he said. Of course He is King of kings but not in a political sense. The Roman governors official residence was at Caesarea but when they came to Jerusalem they came to Herod's palace. They held their trials in the morning, which is the reason that the Jews tried Jesus at night so they could then take Him before Pilate the next morning. Somehow the charge had already been made known to Pilate since he asked Jesus if He were King of the Jews. Luke gives a bit more details of this encounter:

Luke 23:1-3 "Then the whole body of them got up and brought Him before Pilate. (2) And they began to accuse Him, saying, "We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, and saying that He Himself is Christ, a King." (3) So Pilate asked Him, saying, "Are You the King of the Jews?" And He answered him and said, "It is as you say."

Of course Jesus did not forbid anyone to pay taxes to Caesar:

Luke 20:21-26 They questioned Him, saying, "Teacher, we know that You speak and teach correctly, and You are not partial to any, but teach the way of God in truth. (22) "Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" (23) But He detected their trickery and said to them, (24) "Show Me a denarius. Whose likeness and inscription does it have?" They said, "Caesar's." (25) And He said to them, "Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." (26) And they were unable to catch Him in a saying in the presence of the people; and being amazed at His answer, they became silent.

Mark 15:3-5

The chief priests began to accuse Him harshly. (4) Then Pilate questioned Him again, saying, "Do You not answer? See how many charges they bring against You!" (5) But Jesus made no further answer; so Pilate was amazed.

The chief priests then took over the accusations and apparently made many more false accusations of Jesus that Mark does not record. Pilate was amazed that Jesus refused to defend Himself.

Mark 15:6-10

Now at the feast he used to release for them any one prisoner whom they requested. (7) The man named Barabbas had been imprisoned with the insurrectionists who had

committed murder in the insurrection. (8) The crowd went up and began asking him to do as he had been accustomed to do for them. (9) Pilate answered them, saying, "Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" (10) For he was aware that the chief priests had handed Him over because of envy.

Only in the Gospels is this practice of releasing a prisoner at Passover mentioned (Matt 27:15; John 18:39; Luke 23:17). This was a custom in Rome and could have been also in Palestine. We read in Luke 23:19 that there had been an uprising in the city with one of the men involved being Barabbas and they had committed murder. He and the others were probably members of the Zealot party who revolted against Roman rule. To have committed murder made this man and others associated with him severe criminals but the crowd seemed to have gathered primarily to ask for his release. Pilate then gave them the choice between Jesus and Barabbas. It seems that Barabbas had the name Jesus Barabbas and that Pilate had thought they were requesting the release of Jesus of Nazareth. Pilate knew that the Sanhedrin was jealous of Jesus and that was the reason that they had handed Him over to him.

Mark 15:11-15

But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to ask him to release Barabbas for them instead. (12) Answering again, Pilate said to them, "Then what shall I do with Him whom you call the King of the Jews?" (13) They shouted back, "Crucify Him!" (14) But Pilate said to them, "Why, what evil has He done?" But they shouted all the more, "Crucify Him!" (15) Wishing to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas for them, and after having Jesus scourged, he handed Him over to be crucified.

The chief priests had already planned to kill Jesus and they were not about to let Pilate change their plans so they decided to stir up the crowd so that would force Pilate to allow the execution to proceed. Luke records a similar correspondence of Pilate with the chief priests and the crowd (23:13-26). Pilate then gave into the crowd as he acted as a typical politician wanting to please the crowd. Luke elaborates a bit more than Mark in that he found no reason to execute Jesus. Matthew also reports that Pilate's wife warned him not to have anything to do with this innocent man (27:19). But Pilate relented, released the murderer Barabbas, had Jesus scourged, and then handed Him over for crucifixion. Scourging did not have to precede crucifixion so perhaps Pilate was hoping that the flogging would satisfy everyone and he could then have Him released. Flogging was an awful event as the back was left unrecognizable as two guards whipped Him with the flagellum. Victims seldom survived. This handing over of Jesus corresponds with:

Isa 53:6-12 All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him. (7) He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth; Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, So He did not open His mouth. (8) By oppression and judgment He was taken away; And as for His generation, who considered That He was cut off out of the land of the living For the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke was due? (9) His grave was assigned with wicked men, Yet He was with a rich man in His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor was there any deceit in His mouth. (10) But the LORD was pleased To crush Him, putting Him to grief; If He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, And the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand. (11) As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be

satisfied; By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, As He will bear their iniquities. (12) Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, And He will divide the booty with the strong; Because He poured out Himself to death, And was numbered with the transgressors; Yet He Himself bore the sin of many, And interceded for the transgressors.

Mark 15:16-19

*The soldiers took Him away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium), and they *called together the whole Roman cohort. (17) They *dressed Him up in purple, and after twisting a crown of thorns, they put it on Him; (18) and they began to acclaim Him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" 19) They kept beating His head with a reed, and spitting on Him, and kneeling and bowing before Him.*

Now begins the horror as Jesus is taunted, beat, spit upon, and otherwise humiliated as well as continuing the horrible physical abuse. The flogging had taken place in front of Herod's palace in full view of many people. Now they moved Him to the courtyard that had more room for the taunting by the soldiers. Praetorium is a Latin word in Greek that designates a governor's residence. The soldiers were brought to Jerusalem from Caesarea by Pilate and all of them participated in this humiliation and torture. They humiliated Him by taking off His clothes and putting on Him a scarlet military cloak that was probably severely worn but recognizable as what would be worn by a conqueror. This changing of clothes would have been terrible painful as His back and shoulders had been horribly beaten. The crown of thorns would have caused considerable bleeding as they proclaimed Him to be King of the Jews. Matthew reports that they also forced Him to hold a staff as a mock scepter (27:29). They spit on Him and mockingly knelt to Him.

Mark 15:20-22

*After they had mocked Him, they took the purple robe off Him and put His own garments on Him. And they *led Him out to crucify Him. (21) They *pressed into service a passer-by coming from the country, Simon of Cyrene (the father of Alexander and Rufus), to bear His cross. (22) Then they *brought Him to the place Golgotha, which is translated, Place of a Skull.*

They then inflicted more severe pain when they took off the purple robe and put His own garments back on His bloody back. In the account by John, Pilate made a final appeal to the crowd:

*John 19:4-16 Pilate came out again and *said to them, "Behold, I am bringing Him out to you so that you may know that I find no guilt in Him." (5) Jesus then came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate *said to them, "Behold, the Man!" (6) So when the chief priests and the officers saw Him, they cried out saying, "Crucify, crucify!" Pilate *said to them, "Take Him yourselves and crucify Him, for I find no guilt in Him." (7) The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and by that law He ought to die because He made Himself out to be the Son of God." (8) Therefore when Pilate heard this statement, he was even more afraid; (9) and he entered into the Praetorium again and *said to Jesus, "Where are You from?" But Jesus gave him no answer. (10) So Pilate *said to Him, "You do not speak to me? Do You not know that I have authority to release You, and I have authority to crucify You?" (11) Jesus answered, "**You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from***

*above; for this reason he who delivered Me to you has the greater sin." (12) As a result of this Pilate made efforts to release Him, but the Jews cried out saying, "If you release this Man, you are no friend of Caesar; everyone who makes himself out to be a king opposes Caesar." (13) Therefore when Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out, and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called The Pavement, but in Hebrew, Gabbatha. (14) Now it was the day of preparation for the Passover; it was about the sixth hour. And he *said to the Jews, "Behold, your King!" (15) So they cried out, "Away with Him, away with Him, crucify Him!" Pilate *said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar." (16) So he then handed Him over to them to be crucified.*

Pilate could not take a chance that his career would be over if he released Jesus so he gave Jesus over to the crowd to be crucified. Mark does not comment on the crucifixion so we do not know if he was present for it. There are many reports available on the horrible act of crucifixion so I will also not elaborate upon it here. People being crucified were required to carry the heavy wooden crosspiece (patibulum) on which they would be attached but Jesus was too weak to carry it. A bystander was then made to carry the crosspiece for Him. Cyrene is in North Africa and it had a large Jewish population so Simon was no doubt a Jew and probably not an African black man as some state. His two sons are probably mentioned because they were known by the Roman church (Rom 16:13). Golgotha is a modified version of the Aramaic word for skull and the Vulgate translation uses the name Calvary because *calva* is the Latin word for skull. It is not known why the site was so named although the common reason given is that it looked like a skull.

Mark 15:23-25

*They tried to give Him wine mixed with myrrh; but He did not take it. (24) And they *crucified Him, and *divided up His garments among themselves, casting lots for them to decide what each man should take. (25) It was the third hour when they crucified Him. (26) The inscription of the charge against Him read, "THE KING OF THE JEWS." (27) They *crucified two robbers with Him, one on His right and one on His left. (28) [And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "And He was numbered with transgressors."]*

Jesus was offered a drink that contained a narcotic that would have deadened the pain but He refused to drink it. Again Mark just states that Jesus was crucified rather than elaborate upon the horrible nature of the event. Death by crucifixion was an awful way to die but the real horror would come later as recorded by Mark in verse 34. The casting of lots for His clothes fulfilled: "They divide my garments among them, And for my clothing they cast lots." (Psa 22:18). Mark states that it was the third hour (about 9:00 AM) when He was crucified whereas John states that the trial before Pilate was not over by the sixth hour (John 19:14) that would be about 12:00 noon. Matthew and Luke do not include this sentence so one has to try to make the John and Mark account be understood. The most likely reason is that an early copyist confused the Greek letter used for the number three with a similar looking letter for the letter six. All the gospels record the inscription over His head:

- Matt 27:37 And above His head they put up the charge against Him which read, "THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS."
- Mark 15:26 The inscription of the charge against Him read, "THE KING OF THE JEWS."

- Luke 23:38 Now there was also an inscription above Him, "THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS."
- John 19:19-22 Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It was written, "JESUS THE NAZARENE, THE KING OF THE JEWS." (20) Therefore many of the Jews read this inscription, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, Latin *and* in Greek. (21) So the chief priests of the Jews were saying to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews'; but that He said, 'I am King of the Jews.'" (22) Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written."

This title was high treason for the Romans and thus was justification for killing Him. John records the Jews objecting to the title as written but Pilate refused to change it. Two robbers were crucified on either side of Jesus and we will read of His interaction with one of them later. The Greek word actually means "insurrectionists" and they were probably members of the group that included Barabbas. They seem to know that the charges against Jesus were false (Luke 23:41). Verse 28 is not in the oldest manuscripts and was probably an addition quoting Isa 53:12.

Mark 15:29-32

Those passing by were hurling abuse at Him, wagging their heads, and saying, "Ha! You who are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, (30) save Yourself, and come down from the cross!" (31) In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes, were mocking Him among themselves and saying, "He saved others; He cannot save Himself. (32) "Let this Christ, the King of Israel, now come down from the cross, so that we may see and believe!" Those who were crucified with Him were also insulting Him.

The crucifixion must have been near a well-traveled road and travelers continued to mock Jesus as they had heard about Him. Some of them seemed to have remembered His misunderstood statement about the temple (14:58). The chief priest and teachers of the law were also nearby and spoke among themselves and probably within the hearing of Jesus as they continued to pride themselves on their actions against Jesus. Their comment about Him not being able to save Himself was true and false. It was false in the sense that, as the Son of God, He most certainly had the power to save Himself. But it was true in that His mission required this action and He was dedicated to the will of the Father. Luke reports that both criminals were also insulting Him but one of them would have a changed heart:

Luke 23:39-43 One of the criminals who were hanged there was hurling abuse at Him, saying, "Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!" (40) But the other answered, and rebuking him said, "Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? (41) "And we indeed are suffering justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." (42) And he was saying, "Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!" (43) And He said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise."

Mark 15:33-36

When the sixth hour came, darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour. (34) At the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "ELOI, ELOI, LAMA SABACHTHANI?" which is translated, "MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?" (35) When some of the bystanders heard it, they began saying, "Behold, He is calling for

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

This darkness lasted from noon until 3:00 PM and it was over all Judah, not all the earth. All three gospels record the darkness but none give a cause for it. Mark then records the terrible cry from our Lord as He is separated from the Trinity for the first time ever. The full wrath of God came upon Jesus for His taking our sins upon Himself as stated by Paul: *"He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."* (2 Cor 5:21) Note that Paul also states the double imputation principle that our sins were placed upon Jesus and His righteousness was placed upon us. Matthew records this event as: *"About the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "ELI, ELI, LAMA SABACHTHANI?" that is, "MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?"* (Matt 27:46). Matthew records the first part in Hebrew with the remainder in Aramaic. Part of the crowd understood Jesus to be calling for Elijah, or they were speaking in a coarse joke as some people regarded Elijah as a deliverer for people in trouble. Perhaps this understanding of Elijah was also the reason someone tried to offer Jesus the medicinal wine.

Mark 15:37-38

And Jesus uttered a loud cry, and breathed His last. (38) And the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

It is remarkable that Jesus could cry out with a loud voice after six hours of crucifixion and so He died physically. His first advent ended with victory as He would now be accepted back into the Father's home to prepare a place for His people. All synoptic gospels record the tearing of the veil of the temple. This veil separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place and it was torn from top to bottom as a sign of the end of an era. Other writers do assign a theological significance to this event such as:

- *Heb 9:1-14 Now even the first covenant had regulations of divine worship and the earthly sanctuary. (2) For there was a tabernacle prepared, the outer one, in which were the lampstand and the table and the sacred bread; this is called the holy place. (3) Behind the second veil there was a tabernacle which is called the Holy of Holies, (4) having a golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden jar holding the manna, and Aaron's rod which budded, and the tables of the covenant; (5) and above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat; but of these things we cannot now speak in detail. (6) Now when these things have been so prepared, the priests are continually entering the outer tabernacle performing the divine worship, (7) but into the second, only the high priest enters once a year, not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the sins of the people committed in ignorance. (8) The Holy Spirit is signifying this, that the way into the holy place has not yet been disclosed while the outer tabernacle is still standing, (9) which is a symbol for the present time. Accordingly both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make the worshiper perfect in conscience, (10) since they relate only to food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until a time of reformation. (11) But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; (12) and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. (13) For if the blood of goats and bulls and the*

ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, (14) how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

- *Heb 10:19-22 Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, (20) by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, (21) and since we have a great priest over the house of God, (22) let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.*

Mark 15:39-41

When the centurion, who was standing right in front of Him, saw the way He breathed His last, he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!" (40) There were also some women looking on from a distance, among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the Less and Joses, and Salome. (41) When He was in Galilee, they used to follow Him and minister to Him; and there were many other women who came up with Him to Jerusalem.

The soldier would have seen many people die from this cruel act and he was amazed at how Jesus died and even exclaimed that He was the Son of God. We cannot know if the soldier really believed that Jesus was the Son of God but such an exclamation was very meaningful to Mark. Some women had been watching from some distance and Mark identifies three of them. From Luke 8:2 we know that Jesus cast out seven demons from Mary Magdalene. Little is known about the second Mary but her sons must have been well known by the early church since Mark mentions them. The third woman is Salome, Zebedee's wife and the mother of James and John (Matt 27:56). Mark records that they had ministered with Jesus in Galilee. Mark also states that there were many other women who came with Him to Jerusalem.

Mark 15:42-45

When evening had already come, because it was the preparation day, that is, the day before the Sabbath, (43) Joseph of Arimathea came, a prominent member of the Council, who himself was waiting for the kingdom of God; and he gathered up courage and went in before Pilate, and asked for the body of Jesus. (44) Pilate wondered if He was dead by this time, and summoning the centurion, he questioned him as to whether He was already dead. (45) And ascertaining this from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph.

Mark states that it was preparation day and he amplifies by saying that it was the day before the Sabbath. But this Sabbath was Passover Sabbath and not the regular Saturday Sabbath so it was the evening of Thursday with the Jewish next day starting at sundown. So Jesus was buried on our Thursday night. Thus He was buried for three days and three nights as His resurrection was our Sunday before dawn. It was appropriate for according to Exodus 12:6 the lambs were killed at twilight on the night before the Passover Sabbath. It was probably about 4:00 PM and on April 6, 30 AD. Joseph was of Arimathea, which was the birthplace of Samuel (1 Sam 1:1). Mark states that he was a prominent member of the Council (the Sanhedrin) and since Mark states that he was waiting for the kingdom of God, he was also a believer in Jesus. It took a lot of courage for him to ask Pilate for the body of Jesus for that would have identified him as a follower of

Jesus and could have led to his imprisonment or worse and certainly the condemnation of fellow Jews. Luke also states that he had not been in agreement with the decision and action of the council (23:51). All of the disciples but John had fled and apparently His mother was too upset to claim the body. We cannot know if the brothers of Jesus were in Jerusalem at this time. Pilate was surprised that Jesus had already died so he checked with the centurion and then relented to let Joseph have the body. Otherwise His body would have been placed in a common grave for criminals. It was very unusual for Pilate to give the body of a man convicted of high treason to be given a good burial and this may be another indication that Pilate did not believe that Jesus was really guilty.

Mark 15:46-47

Joseph bought a linen cloth, took Him down, wrapped Him in the linen cloth and laid Him in a tomb which had been hewn out in the rock; and he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. (47) Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph were looking on to see where He was laid.

Matthew describes Joseph as being rich (27:57) so he probably had servants to help him take down the body of Jesus, wrap Him in the linen cloth and put Him into a new tomb. John also writes that Nicodemus helped Joseph and supplied some of the spices used in the preparation of a body for burial (19:39). Other writings inform us of some more details:

- *Matt 27:59-61 And 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 out in the rock; and he rolled a large stone against the entrance of the tomb and went away. (61) And Mary Magdalene was there, and the other Mary, sitting opposite the grave.*
- *John 19:38-42 After these things Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but a secret one for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate granted permission. So he came and took away His body. (39) Nicodemus, who had first come to Him by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds weight. (40) So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen wrappings with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews. (41) Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. (42) Therefore because of the Jewish day of preparation, since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.*

Mark mentions the two women were present so they would have known where to go later as Mark records in the next chapter.