

Sunday School Lesson

Mark 15: Trial and Death (August 2, 2026)

Set the Stage

- You will see that later Gospels embellish some of Mark's concise details.
- Crowds from the country descended on Jerusalem for the Passover. The city was crowded and tempers were short. Pilate just wants to maintain peace and stability until the holiday is over. He temporarily moved to Jerusalem to personally oversee the Roman guard.
- After arresting Jesus on the Mount of Olives, a night-time sham trial was held at Caiaphas' house, the Chief Priest.
- To legitimize the proceedings, the full Sanhedrin was called to his house at daybreak because council decisions made at night were invalid.
- A Jewish-ordered death sentence must delay 24 hours for possible introduction of additional evidence. However, a Roman-ordered death sentence could be immediate.
- Blasphemy against the Jewish god was not a capital offense to Romans, so chief priests modified their charge against Jesus to sound like a challenge to Caesar's authority.

Read **Mark 15:1-5**.

Jesus refused to answer ridiculous charges.

Barabbas

Pilate was aware that Jesus had been brought to him because of the chief priests' hatred and envy. He saw no good reason to harm Jesus, but he also wanted to defuse any mobs. With a false sense of benevolence, Pilate makes an offer to the crowd. (Mark 15:6-15)

⁶ Now it was the custom at the festival to release a prisoner whom the people requested. ⁷ A man called Barabbas was in prison with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the uprising. ⁸ The crowd came up and asked Pilate to do for them what he usually did.

⁹ "Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?" asked Pilate, ¹⁰ knowing it was out of self-interest that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him. ¹¹ But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have Pilate release Barabbas instead.

¹² "What shall I do, then, with the one you call the king of the Jews?" Pilate asked them.

¹³ "Crucify him!" they shouted.

¹⁴ "Why? What crime has he committed?" asked Pilate.

But they shouted all the louder, “Crucify him!”

¹⁵ Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.

The masses have spoken and Pilate dared not renege on his offer.

This is all that Mark recounts about Jesus’ trials: one appearance before Pilate. In Luke 23 there are additional details:

- First w/Pilate and the false accusations from the chief priests

² And they began to accuse him, saying, “We found this man perverting our nation, and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ a king.” ³ And Pilate asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” And he answered him, “You have said so.”

- Second w/Herod: When Pilate found Jesus was a Galilean, he sent Jesus to Herod. Herod wanted Jesus to show off his miracles, but Jesus was mute, so Herod & his soldiers mocked Jesus, dressed him in purple and sent him back to Pilate.

- Third, back to Pilate and the release of Barabbas.

Matthew only describes the one encounter with Pilate, nothing about Herod, but he includes Pilate washing his hands.

John, also, only describes the encounter with Pilate, but he goes into detail describing Peter’s denials during the night of the first Sanhedrin trial.

Soldiers’ Treatment of Jesus

Apparently these soldiers were brutes and just itching to torment a captive.

(Mark 15:16-20)

¹⁶ The soldiers led Jesus away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium) and called together the whole company of soldiers. ¹⁷ They put a purple robe on him, then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him. ¹⁸ And they began to call out to him, “Hail, king of the Jews!” ¹⁹ Again and again they struck him on the head with a staff and spit on him. Falling on their knees, they paid homage to him. ²⁰ And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

All this time, Jesus did not answer their taunts. Read **Isaiah 42:1-2**.

Simon

Physically exhausted by the beatings, Jesus is unable to carry his cross (or part of it).

A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross. – Mark 15:21

Mark does not usually include excess details. So, why mention Alexander and Rufus? Is this, perhaps, the same man that Paul identified in Romans 16:13?

Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother, who has been a mother to me, too.

The Crucifixion

Read **Mark 15:22-28**.

- Jewish day started at 6:00am, so “the third hour” was 9:00am.
- Some manuscripts omit verse 28, while others include text similar to Luke 22:37.
- Remember that Mark’s intended audience consists of Roman Christians. They are used to crucifixions, but Mark wants to impress on them that these events were all predicted by the prophets of old and this is the fulfillment.
- The Gospel of John includes the reference to a soldier giving Jesus a sponge of vinegar on a reed. He also includes Jesus’ request that John take care of his mother.
- The two men crucified with Jesus had to be guilty of more than theft; perhaps insurrection.
- Passersby taunted him while on the cross. (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.

For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” – Mark 10:45

Death

Unnatural darkness came at noon (“the sixth hour”), and he died at 3:00pm.

*“And on that day,” says the Lord God,
“I will make the sun go down at noon,
and darken the earth in broad daylight. – Amos 8:9*

(Read **Mark 15:33-39**).

Regarding the rending of the temple curtain:

²⁶ the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the Lord's people. ²⁷ To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. – Colossians 1:26-27

“The mystery is out: Jesus is the final revelation and the Holy of Holies is open to all people, including the Gentiles.”¹

Many women were in the back of the crowd, including Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the Less (son of Alphaeus) & Joses, and Salome.

Burial

Romans preferred that the bodies of crucified criminals simply rot on their crosses as a warning to others, or to finally fall off their crosses to be ravaged by wild animals. But, Jewish law required immediate burial.

²² “And if a man has committed a crime punishable by death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, ²³ his body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but you shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is accursed by God; you shall not defile your land which the Lord your God gives you for an inheritance. – Deuteronomy 21:22-23

Friday night, the Day of Preparation for Passover, and the day before Sabbath: Mark 15:42-47.

⁴² And when evening had come, 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 looking for the kingdom of God, took courage and went to Pilate, and asked for the body of Jesus. ⁴⁴ And Pilate wondered if he were already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he was already dead. ⁴⁵ And when he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the body to Joseph. ⁴⁶ And he bought a linen shroud, and taking him down, wrapped him in the linen shroud, and laid him in a tomb which had been hewn out of the rock; and he rolled a stone against the door of the tomb. ⁴⁷ Mary Mag'dalene and Mary the mother of Joses saw where he was laid.

Joseph of Arimathea is a member of the Sanhedrin, but was not part of the conspiracy against Jesus. He was looking for the Kingdom of God; he was a prototype “closet Christian.”²

¹ McKenna, p.317.

Summary:

Mark demonstrated that Jesus was the fulfillment of the ancient prophecies: He was not what was expected, but He was what was promised.

References:

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² McKenna, p. 320.