

from. When Jesus refused to speak, Pilate reminded him that he had the power to crucify him. Jesus' reply made Pilate even more anxious to free him 'you would have no power if it was not given you from above, for this reason the one who handed me over to you has the greater guilt'.

- John then depicts the Sanhedrin playing their trump card, shouting that Pilate is no friend of Caesar if he sets free someone who claims to be a king. Hearing this, Pilate comes out **a fourth time** and sits Jesus on the chair of Judgement. In a final bid to free Jesus Pilate asks 'shall I crucify your king?' The chief priests answer that they have no king but Caesar.

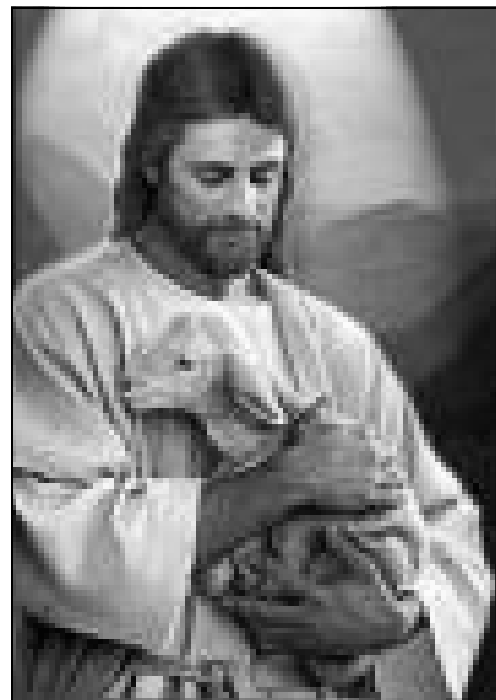
Although Jesus is now condemned, in fact John shows that it is the Sanhedrin which has also **condemned itself**. Jesus has been revealed as King, is dressed in the role, yet is rejected. Not only that but the Sanhedrin have been shown to be guilty of blasphemy, the very charge they made against Jesus, by proclaiming they have no king but Caesar, rejecting Yahweh as their God and King. Pilate, representing the power of the Empire, is absolved from direct guilt for Jesus' death as he had made **four attempts** to free Jesus.

Jesus' Death

John agrees with the synoptic authors that Jesus is crucified with two others, that a notice is placed on the cross about him being King of the Jews, and that his clothes are divided, adding the detail that the lots were used to determine which soldier received his seamless garment. But he records 3 new occasions when Jesus speaks: in asking a disciple to care for his mother 'woman this is your son, son this your mother'; to say 'I am thirsty'; and finally before he dies 'it is fulfilled'. John also reveals that Jesus' body was taken for burial by both Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus. Their presence provides, in my view, the answer to the mystery of the unnamed disciple who helps Peter enter the High Priest's palace. That disciple can not be John himself as some maintain, while John does not name him because he would then have to show their support for Jesus at his trial and this would work against his objective of showing the Sanhedrin in such a negative light.

Jesus in the Gospels

19. The Passion Narrative in St. John's Gospel



Questions For Reflection

1. What are the main differences between John's version of the Passion and that in the synoptic gospels?
2. Who might be the disciple known to the high priest?
3. What is the importance of Joseph of Arimathaea?

The Passion Events

John's Gospel has a similar Passion account (ch.18 and 19) as that in the synoptic gospels, but emphasises even more than Luke does the culpability of the Jews in Jesus' death and the relative innocence of the Romans.



Intriguingly, John does not give an account of Jesus' trial before the Sanhedrin, replacing it with a detail omitted in the synoptic gospels, namely that Jesus was first taken to Annas, the father-in-law of the High Priest Caiaphas. Annas had himself been High Priest and five of his sons had been High Priest as well. John records that he lived in the High Priest's palace and he may well have been the real power within the Sadducees and behind Caiaphas. It seems from John's account of that meeting (Jn.18) that Annas wanted to know more about Jesus' teaching and his disciples. The stages followed in John's Passion account are as follows:

- Judas' betrays Jesus who is arrested in a Kidron Valley garden
- Jesus is taken to Annas
- Jesus is taken to Caiaphas (and presumably the Sanhedrin)
- Peter's denies knowledge of Jesus 3 times
- Jesus is taken to Pilate at the Praetorium, a judicial court
- Jesus is condemned and carries his cross
- Jesus on the cross and his death
- Jesus is taken down from the cross and buried

Jesus Trial with Pilate

John's gospel provides an absorbing account of Jesus' trial before Pilate, although he does not mention Luke's detail (Lk.23) that Pilate also sent Jesus to Herod. This is probably because it would have interrupted the flow about what he wanted to achieve, namely that in condemning Jesus, the Jews were, in reality, condemning themselves. In the process of showing this, John, even more than Luke, also absolved the Romans from any real guilt in Jesus' death. John shows that Jesus' trial took place in the morning (ch.18) of a Friday before

the day of Passover. This is deduced from the fact that there was a rush to ensure that Jesus' did not remain on the cross on the Sabbath 'since that Sabbath was a day of special solemnity' (ch.19), that is, it was also the feast of the Passover. As such the Sanhedrin did not want to be defiled before the feast by entering a gentile building, and Pilate is depicted as going outside the Praetorium several times to speak to them. This enhances the drama:



- In Pilate's **first meeting** with the Sanhedrin, Jesus is branded as a **criminal** who should be put to death. The Sanhedrin stress that they are not allowed to carry out capital punishment, yet previously they were willing to do just that and stone Jesus to death for blasphemy (Jn.8 and 10). It appears that the Sanhedrin wanted the decision to execute Jesus to be a Roman decision, perhaps to ensure that Jesus' death would be a public event.
- Pilate returns to the Praetorium but, surprisingly given what appears to have been discussed with the Sanhedrin, questions Jesus about whether he is King of the Jews. There follows an interchange between the two and Jesus reveals he is a King, but not of this world, and that he has come to bear witness to the truth
- Pilate comes a **second time** to tell the Sanhedrin that he finds no fault with Jesus and, to honour a Jewish custom, offers to release Jesus, calling him 'King of the Jews'. However, the Sanhedrin shout for the release of a bandit, Barabbas.
- Pilate has Jesus scourged, and the soldiers crown him with thorns and a purple robe, and mock him. Although this incident is omitted in Luke so as to avoid showing the Romans in a brutal light, John includes it because as part of his drama he wants to show Jesus as **King**. Pilate then goes out a **third time** bringing Jesus with him, again stating he finds no case against him. Again the Sanhedrin ask for his execution shouting 'crucify him' and now place the charge of **blasphemy** against him, that Jesus called himself the 'Son of God' John reveals that this increased Pilate's fears and he went back into the Praetorium with Jesus to clarify where he came