

Dr. Mark Jennings, Mark, Session 23, Pilate, Passion, Crucifixion (Mark 15:1-32) Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Jennings, Mark, Session 23, Pilate, Passion, Crucifixion (Mark 15:1-32), Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Mark Jennings' lecture, the twenty-third session on the Gospel of Mark, focuses on Mark 15:1-32, specifically the events surrounding Jesus' hearing before Pilate and his subsequent crucifixion. The lecture explores the historical context of these events, examining the character of Pontius Pilate as depicted in the Gospels compared to other historical accounts and discussing the custom of releasing a prisoner during Passover. **Jennings addresses the historicity of the Gospel narrative, considering arguments for and against its accuracy, including the release of Barabbas and Pilate's interactions with Jesus.** The lecture then proceeds through the initial stages of the crucifixion, highlighting the mockery by the soldiers and Simon of Cyrene being compelled to carry Jesus' cross to Golgotha. **Jennings analyzes the offer of wine mixed with myrrh, the act of casting lots for Jesus' garments, and the timing of the crucifixion.** Ultimately, the session emphasizes that Mark's account prioritizes the theological significance of Christ's suffering as the sacrificial servant over a detailed description of the physical act of crucifixion.

2. 16 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Jennings, Mark, Session 23 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (New Testament → Gospels → Mark).



**Jennings_Mark_Ses
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3. Briefing Document: Jennings, Session 23, Pilate, Passion, Crucifixion (Mark 15:1-32)

Briefing Document: Dr. Mark Jennings on Mark 15:1-32 (Pilate, Passion, and Crucifixion)

Overview: This lecture by Dr. Mark Jennings provides an in-depth analysis of Mark 15:1-32, focusing on Jesus' hearing before Pilate and the subsequent events leading to his crucifixion. Jennings examines the historical context, potential discrepancies between the Gospel account and other historical sources, and the theological significance of the events as presented by Mark.

Main Themes and Important Ideas/Facts:

1. The Hearing Before Pilate (Mark 15:1-15):

- **Brevity in Mark's Account:** Jennings notes that while Mark provides significant detail, his account of Jesus' hearing before Pilate is briefer compared to other Gospels. It omits details like Pilate's wife's dream or Pilate sending Jesus to Herod Antipas.
- **Historical Certainty of Crucifixion under Pilate:** Despite the brevity, Jennings emphasizes the strong historical certainty of Jesus' crucifixion under Pontius Pilate, citing not only the four Gospels but also other historical documents. He states, "...one of the things that is perhaps a strong historical certainty, in fact, might be one of the strongest certainties we have from ancient history, is that Jesus was crucified under Pontius Pilate."
- **Debate on the Historical Accuracy of Gospel Depiction:** While the crucifixion itself is widely accepted, Jennings highlights the discussion around the historical accuracy of the Gospel's portrayal of the events leading up to it, particularly regarding Pilate's character and the release of Barabbas.
- **Pilate's Character:** External historical sources like Philo and Josephus depict Pilate as a cruel and uncompromising ruler, often at odds with the Jewish leadership. This contrasts with Mark's portrayal of Pilate seemingly hesitant to crucify Jesus and attempting to release him.
- "when you look at Philo, you look at Josephus, you look at other accounts of Pilate, and it's very clear he is a very cruel person. He was a person who had no

difficulty in upsetting the Jewish population...Pilate seems very willing to say no to the Jewish leadership, in other words, and very willing to stand against them."

- The apparent discrepancy is addressed by suggesting that Pilate, having faced complaints to Rome about his harsh rule, might have been more cautious and willing to appease the local population during this period to maintain his position.
- **The Release of Barabbas:** The custom of releasing a prisoner during Passover, mentioned in all four Gospels, lacks strong historical evidence outside of these accounts. This raises questions about its historicity.
- Jennings offers counterarguments, suggesting that such acts of releasing prisoners during times of unrest were not uncommon for rulers seeking to maintain good relations.
- He also argues that the mention of Barabbas in all Gospels makes it unlikely to be a later invention by the Church. "if there wasn't something that had occurred like this if this incident or this event had not happened, why would the Gospel writers or the Church sort of develop a tradition of this Barabbas character and insert it, especially citing that this was a custom?"
- **Pilate's Motivation:** Jennings suggests Pilate might have offered to release Jesus, whom he perceived was delivered out of envy by the chief priests, expecting the crowd to choose him over Barabbas, whom he likely considered a genuine threat due to his involvement in insurrection and murder. "For he perceived it was out of envy that the chief priests had delivered him up."
- **The Title "King of the Jews":** Pilate's use of this title for Jesus, both in questioning and on the cross, is seen as a point supporting historicity, as it was not a common title used by Jesus or the early church but would have been understandable from a Roman perspective regarding the Messiah figure.
- **Jesus' Silence and Response to Pilate:** Jesus remains largely silent in the face of accusations, which amazes Pilate. However, he does respond to Pilate's direct question about being the King of the Jews with "You have said so," a response Jennings interprets as a qualified yes, acknowledging the title in words and authority but perhaps not in the way Pilate understands it.
- **The Sanhedrin's Lack of Authority for Execution:** Jennings reiterates that the Jewish council did not have the authority under Roman rule to carry out capital punishment, necessitating their appeal to Pilate.

- **Pilate's Presence in Jerusalem:** During festivals like Passover, Pilate would typically reside in Jerusalem (likely at Herod's Palace) due to the increased population and potential for unrest. This facilitated the quick delivery of Jesus to him.
- **The Handing Over of Jesus:** This event fulfills Jesus' earlier passion predictions in Mark, where he foretold being handed over to both Jewish and Gentile authorities.
- **Pilate's Acquiescence to the Crowd:** Despite his initial hesitation and perceived understanding of the situation, Pilate ultimately releases Barabbas and hands Jesus over to be crucified, wishing to satisfy the crowd and maintain social peace. This parallels Herod's decision regarding John the Baptist.

2. The Road to Crucifixion and the Crucifixion Itself (Mark 15:16-32):

- **Mockery by the Soldiers:** Inside the governor's headquarters (praetorium), the soldiers mock Jesus, dressing him in a purple cloak, placing a crown of thorns on his head, saluting him as "Hail, King of the Jews!", striking him with a reed, and spitting on him. This is depicted as a cruel parody of a coronation.
- **Fulfillment of Passion Predictions:** The spitting on Jesus aligns with the suffering servant motif described in Isaiah and fulfills Jesus' own predictions of his suffering.
- **Simon of Cyrene:** A passerby coming from the country is compelled to carry Jesus' cross. The mention of his sons, Alexander and Rufus, suggests their potential significance within the early Christian community, possibly indicating eyewitness testimony or Mark writing to a Roman audience familiar with Rufus (mentioned in Romans 16:13).
- **Golgotha (Place of the Skull) / Calvary:** Jesus is brought to Golgotha, which translates to "place of the skull" (Aramaic). "Calvary" is the Latin equivalent ("Calvaria locus"). Its location was likely a public thoroughfare.
- **Wine Mixed with Myrrh:** The soldiers offer Jesus wine mixed with myrrh, which Jennings interprets as likely another form of insult rather than a sedative, given Mark's portrayal of the soldiers' cruelty and the lack of comfort offered to Jesus. Jesus refuses to take it, possibly demonstrating his resolve to face his suffering with a clear mind or fulfilling a self-imposed abstinence.

- **Crucifixion and Division of Garments:** Jesus is crucified, and the soldiers divide his garments by casting lots, a detail that finds resonance in later theological interpretations and potentially Old Testament prophecy (though not explicitly mentioned in this excerpt).
- **Time of Crucifixion:** The crucifixion occurs at the third hour (approximately 9 a.m.). Jennings notes the fluidity of timekeeping during this period.
- **Lack of Detailed Description of Crucifixion:** Mark provides relatively little detail about the physical act of crucifixion itself. Jennings suggests this might be because it was a widely known practice or because the Gospel's focus is more on the theological significance of Christ's sacrifice than the graphic details of his suffering. "it isn't the gore of the moment that is the subject of the event. It is the authority of Christ here laying down his life as the sacrificial suffering servant, as an atonement."

Quotes:

- "one of the things that is perhaps a strong historical certainty, in fact, might be one of the strongest certainties we have from ancient history, is that Jesus was crucified under Pontius Pilate."
- "when you look at Philo, you look at Josephus, you look at other accounts of Pilate, and it's very clear he is a very cruel person...Pilate seems very willing to say no to the Jewish leadership, in other words, and very willing to stand against them."
- "if there wasn't something that had occurred like this if this incident or this event had not happened, why would the Gospel writers or the Church sort of develop a tradition of this Barabbas character and insert it, especially citing that this was a custom?"
- "For he perceived it was out of envy that the chief priests had delivered him up."
- "it isn't the gore of the moment that is the subject of the event. It is the authority of Christ here laying down his life as the sacrificial suffering servant, as an atonement."

Conclusion:

Dr. Jennings' lecture on Mark 15:1-32 offers a comprehensive overview of the events leading to Jesus' crucifixion, highlighting the historical context, potential challenges to the Gospel narrative's complete historical accuracy, and the theological significance of Jesus' trial before Pilate and his subsequent suffering. The lecture emphasizes the historical certainty of the crucifixion under Pontius Pilate while exploring the nuances and potential interpretations of the Gospel account in light of other historical evidence. It sets the stage for the final acts of Jesus' passion in Mark's narrative.

4. Study Guide: Jennings, Session 23, Pilate, Passion, Crucifixion (Mark 15:1-32)

Study Guide: Mark 15:1-32

Key Themes:

- Jesus' trial before Pontius Pilate
- The historical context and challenges to the Gospel accounts of Pilate's actions
- The release of Barabbas and the crowd's demand for Jesus' crucifixion
- The Roman soldiers' mockery of Jesus
- The journey to Golgotha and the crucifixion
- The significance of Jesus' silence and responses during his trial
- The contrast between worldly power and Jesus' authority
- The fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies (implied through suffering servant motif)

Quiz:

1. According to Mark's Gospel, what details of Jesus' hearing before Pilate are notably absent compared to other Gospel accounts? Give at least two examples.
2. What are the two main historical challenges raised regarding the accuracy of Mark's depiction of Pilate and the events surrounding Jesus' trial?
3. What are some of the arguments presented in the lecture to support the historical plausibility of Pilate offering to release a prisoner during Passover, despite limited external evidence?
4. Why does the lecturer suggest that Pilate might have been more inclined to appease the Jewish leadership and crowds during this particular time?
5. What is the significance of Pilate's use of the title "King of the Jews" in his interactions with Jesus and on the inscription placed on the cross?
6. Why did the Sanhedrin need to bring Jesus before Pilate for judgment, according to the lecture? Where was Pilate typically based, and why was he in Jerusalem at this time?

7. What was Pilate's reaction to Jesus' silence in the face of the accusations brought against him? What is the significance of this reaction?
8. Describe the scene of the Roman soldiers mocking Jesus. What symbolic actions did they perform?
9. Why would Rome use crucifixion as a method of execution? What made it a particularly shameful form of death?
10. What is the meaning of the name "Golgotha," and what is the connection to the term "Calvary"? Why might this location have been chosen for Jesus' crucifixion?

Quiz Answer Key:

1. Mark's account lacks details such as Pilate's wife's dream and plea, and Pilate sending Jesus to Herod Antipas. It also presents a much briefer conversation between Pilate and Jesus compared to John's Gospel.
2. The two main challenges are the depiction of Pilate as seemingly hesitant to crucify Jesus, which contrasts with historical accounts of his cruelty, and the lack of significant external evidence for the custom of releasing a prisoner during Passover.
3. Arguments include the fact that Barabbas is mentioned in all four Gospels, and the practice of rulers releasing prisoners during times of unrest was not uncommon in the ancient world, even referenced in the Mishnah. The custom might have also been a recent development by Pilate.
4. Pilate might have felt his position as governor was less secure due to past conflicts with Jewish leaders that were reported to Rome, and the uncertain political climate in Rome itself. He may have wanted to avoid further unrest or complaints.
5. "King of the Jews" was not a title Jesus or the early church commonly used, suggesting its historical authenticity as a Roman understanding of the Messiah figure. It also potentially reflects Jesus making messianic claims, however Pilate interpreted them.
6. The Sanhedrin did not have the authority to execute Jesus under Roman rule; only the Roman governor could impose capital punishment. Pilate was typically based in Caesarea Maritima but would come to Jerusalem during festivals like Passover due to the increased population and potential for unrest.

7. Pilate was amazed by Jesus' silence. This silence, in the face of serious accusations, is presented as a display of Jesus' power and authority, akin to the amazement evoked by his miracles and teachings in Mark's Gospel.
8. The soldiers mocked Jesus by dressing him in a purple cloak (symbolic of royalty), placing a crown of thorns on his head, saluting him as "Hail, King of the Jews," striking him with a reed (possibly a mock scepter), spitting on him, and kneeling before him in false homage.
9. Rome used crucifixion as a public display of its power and a deterrent against rebellion. It was a slow, painful, and shameful form of death, often involving nakedness and exposure, emphasizing the powerlessness of the condemned.
10. "Golgotha" is an Aramaic term meaning "place of the skull." "Calvary" is derived from the Latin translation, "Calvaria locus," also meaning "place of the skull." The location was likely a public thoroughfare, allowing for maximum visibility of the crucifixion as a warning. The "skull" reference may relate to the terrain or its association with death.

Essay Format Questions:

1. Analyze the portrayal of Pontius Pilate in Mark 15:1-15. How does Mark present Pilate's motivations and actions, and to what extent does this align with or diverge from other historical accounts discussed in the lecture?
2. Discuss the significance of the crowd's role in the events leading to Jesus' crucifixion in Mark 15:6-15. What factors might have influenced their decision to demand the release of Barabbas and the crucifixion of Jesus?
3. Explore the theme of mockery and humiliation in Mark 15:16-20. How do the actions of the Roman soldiers serve to underscore or ironically comment on Jesus' identity as "King of the Jews"?
4. Evaluate the arguments for and against the historical accuracy of the events described in Mark 15:1-15, particularly focusing on the release of Barabbas and Pilate's apparent reluctance to crucify Jesus.
5. Consider the literary and theological significance of Jesus' silence during his trial before Pilate (Mark 15:4-5). How does this silence contribute to Mark's overall portrayal of Jesus' passion and identity?

Glossary of Key Terms:

- **Sanhedrin:** The supreme Jewish council in Judea during the time of Jesus, composed of priests, elders, and scribes.
- **Pontius Pilate:** The Roman prefect (governor) of Judea who presided over Jesus' trial and ordered his crucifixion.
- **Passover:** A major Jewish festival commemorating the liberation of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. It was a time of high religious and national significance.
- **Barabbas:** A prisoner who had committed murder and insurrection, and whom the crowd chose to be released instead of Jesus.
- **Scourging:** A severe form of Roman flogging, often inflicted before crucifixion.
- **Praetorium:** The governor's official residence or headquarters. In the context of Mark 15, it refers to Herod's Palace where Pilate was staying.
- **Golgotha:** An Aramaic word meaning "place of the skull," the site where Jesus was crucified (also known as Calvary).
- **Myrrh:** A fragrant resin used in ancient times for various purposes, including incense and embalming. The wine mixed with myrrh offered to Jesus is debated as to whether it was intended as a sedative or an insult.
- **Crucifixion:** A brutal method of execution used by the Romans, involving nailing or binding the condemned to a cross and leaving them to die.
- **Passion Prediction:** Instances in the Gospels where Jesus foretells his suffering, death, and resurrection.

5. FAQs on Jennings, Mark, Session 23, Pilate, Passion, Crucifixion (Mark 15:1-32), Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions on Mark 15:1-32

1. How does Mark's account of Jesus before Pilate differ from other Gospel accounts?

Mark provides a more concise account of Jesus' hearing before Pilate compared to other Gospels. Notably, Mark omits details such as Pilate's wife's dream, Pilate sending Jesus to Herod Antipas, and the extensive dialogue between Pilate and Jesus found in John's Gospel. Despite the brevity, Mark still presents significant information about this historical event.

2. What historical challenges exist regarding the Gospel depiction of Pilate and the release of Barabbas?

Secular historical sources like Philo and Josephus portray Pontius Pilate as a cruel and uncompromising ruler, seemingly at odds with the Gospel depiction of a Pilate who appears hesitant to crucify Jesus and attempts to release him. Furthermore, the supposed custom of releasing a prisoner during Passover, which is the justification for offering Barabbas, lacks significant historical corroboration outside the Gospels.

3. How does the lecture address the historical challenges surrounding Pilate's portrayal and the release of Barabbas in Mark?

The lecture offers several points to address these challenges. First, the mention of Barabbas in all four Gospels suggests the event's historicity. Second, the practice of rulers releasing prisoners during times of unrest wasn't uncommon in the ancient world. Third, Pilate's seemingly uncharacteristic behavior might be explained by his potentially precarious political position at the time, having previously faced complaints to Rome from Jewish leaders. Finally, the lecture emphasizes that even in Mark's account, Pilate ultimately does crucify Jesus, highlighting that he is not depicted as a gentle figure.

4. Why is the title "King of the Jews" significant in Mark's narrative of the crucifixion?

The title "King of the Jews," used by Pilate when questioning Jesus and displayed on the cross, is significant because it was not a title Jesus commonly used for himself, nor was it a primary title used by the early church. Its presence suggests a historical reality, as it would have been a Roman way of understanding the concept of the Messiah. The fact that the early church didn't invent and insert a less common title supports its

authenticity. It also hints that Jesus did make messianic claims, which Pilate interpreted through a Roman lens.

5. What was the significance of the Sanhedrin bringing Jesus to Pilate? Why couldn't they execute him themselves?

The Sanhedrin brought Jesus to Pilate because, under Roman rule, local Jewish authorities generally lacked the power to impose capital punishment. Rome typically reserved this authority for its own officials to maintain control. Therefore, the Sanhedrin needed to convince the Roman governor, Pilate, to carry out the execution.

6. What is the significance of Jesus' silence before Pilate, and why was Pilate amazed by it?

Jesus' silence in response to the numerous accusations brought against him by the chief priests is a powerful moment in Mark's Gospel. Throughout Mark, amazement is often a reaction to Jesus' miraculous actions and authoritative teachings. Here, the amazement of Pilate stems not from what Jesus says but from his refusal to speak. This silence, in the face of serious charges, suggests a unique form of authority and control on Jesus' part.

7. What was the likely motivation behind Pilate's offer to release "the King of the Jews" during Passover?

Pilate likely offered to release Jesus, referred to as "the King of the Jews," during the Passover custom (or what Pilate perceived as such) because he believed Jesus was not a genuine threat to Roman authority. Mark suggests Pilate perceived that the chief priests had delivered Jesus up out of envy. By offering Jesus as the prisoner to be released, Pilate may have hoped to appease the crowd, undermine the religious leaders, and potentially avoid further unrest, while also maintaining his authority by appearing to acknowledge their concerns.

8. What aspects of the crucifixion narrative in Mark highlight the themes of mockery and the demonstration of Roman power?

The mockery of Jesus by the Roman soldiers, including the purple cloak, crown of thorns, false salutations ("Hail, King of the Jews!"), striking him with a reed, and spitting on him, underscores the humiliation and degradation Jesus endured. The act of crucifixion itself, a public and agonizing form of execution, was a clear demonstration of Roman power and a deterrent against any perceived threats to their authority. The dividing of Jesus' garments among the soldiers further emphasizes his utter powerlessness in this situation.