

Tried *and* Crucified



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Mark 15, Luke 13:1, Ps. 22:18, John 20:24–29, John 1:1–3, Dan. 9:24–27.*

Memory Text: “And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?’ which is translated, ‘My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?’ ” (*Mark 15:34, NKJV*).

Mark 15 is the heart of the Passion Narrative. It presents the trial of Jesus, His condemnation, the mockery by the soldiers, His crucifixion, and then His death and burial. The events in this chapter are presented in stark, crisp detail, likely because the author let the facts speak for themselves.

Throughout this chapter, irony plays an important role. Because of this, it is helpful to have a clear definition of what irony is.

Irony often contains three components: (1) two levels of meaning, (2) the two levels are in conflict or contrast to each other, and (3) someone does not see the irony and does not recognize what is happening and does not know that he or she is the one who will suffer the consequences.

This week, from the question of Pilate, “ ‘Are you the king of the Jews?’ ” to the mocking soldiers, the sign above the cross, and the mocking of the religious leaders, “ ‘He saved others; Himself He cannot save,’ ” to the unexpected appearance of Joseph of Arimathea, the chapter is filled with painful ironies that nevertheless reveal powerful truths about the death of Jesus and what it means.

* *Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 21.*

“Are You the King of the Jews?”

Read Mark 15:1–15. What kind of ironic situations occur here?

Pontius Pilate was the governor of Judea from A.D. 26–A.D. 36. He was not a kind leader, and a number of his actions caused consternation among the inhabitants of the land (*compare with Luke 13:1*). The Jewish trial of Jesus resulted in a death sentence for blasphemy. But under Roman rule, the Jews could not execute people in most cases, and so, they brought Jesus to Pilate for condemnation.

The charge against Jesus before Pilate is not mentioned, but it is possible to ascertain the charge based on the brief question that Pilate asks Jesus: “‘Are you the King of the Jews?’ ” (*Mark 15:2, ESV*). In Old Testament times, Israel anointed its kings; so, it is not hard to see how the term Messiah (“Anointed One”) could be twisted into claiming homage as a king in competition with the emperor. Thus, the charge brought before the Sanhedrin was blasphemy while the charge brought before the governor was sedition, which would lead to death.

The irony is that Jesus is both the Messiah and the King of the Jews. His convictions for blasphemy and sedition were mistaken; He should have received homage and worship instead. Yet, Jesus still acts in a kingly manner. His response to Pilate, “‘You have said so’ ” (*Mark 15:2, ESV*), is noncommittal. He does not deny the title or affirm it. This response may suggest that He is a king but of a different sort (*compare with John 18:33–38*).

Mark 15:6 introduces into the narrative a custom of releasing a prisoner at the time of the Passover. In Mark 15:9, Pilate asks if they want him to release the “‘King of the Jews,’ ” and though he might have meant it ironically, the irony is really playing out against him.

Mark 15:9, 10 is a study in perception and imperception. Pilate perceives that the religious leaders turned over Jesus because of envy, but he does not perceive that, by asking the crowd, he is playing into the hands of the religious leaders. They stir up the crowd and call for Jesus’ crucifixion. Pilate recoils. Crucifixion was such a terrible way to die, particularly for one he considered innocent. How painfully ironic that the pagan governor wanted to release the Messiah while the religious leaders wanted Him crucified.

What can keep you from following the crowd when the pressure is great to do so?

Hail, King of the Jews!

Read Mark 15:15–20. What did the soldiers do to Jesus, and what is its significance?

The Romans utilized a severe form of beating to prepare prisoners for execution. The victim was stripped of his clothes, tied to a pole, and then lashed with leather whips to which pieces of bone, glass, stones, and nails were tied.

After Jesus was whipped, the soldiers tasked with His execution continued His humiliation by clothing Him in a purple robe, placing a crown of thorns on His head, and mocking Him as king of the Jews. The group of soldiers is called a battalion, in this case anywhere from 200 to 600 men.

The irony in the scene is evident to the reader because Jesus really is the King, and the mocking words of the soldiers proclaim this truth. The action of the soldiers was a parody of how soldiers hailed the Roman emperor with the words “Hail, Caesar, Emperor!” Thus, there is an implicit comparison to the emperor.

The actions of the soldiers in mocking Jesus are “striking” His head with a reed, “spitting” on Him, and “kneeling down” in mock homage. All three of these actions are expressed in Greek with the imperfect tense. In this setting, this tense has the idea of repetitive action. Thus, they kept striking Him, kept spitting on Him, and kept kneeling down in mock homage before Him. Jesus takes all of this in silence, not responding at all.

The typical pattern of Roman execution by crucifixion involved having the convicted person carry the cross naked to the place of execution. This pattern, again, was to humiliate and shame the person completely before the community.

But the Jews abhorred public nakedness. Mark 15:20 notes that they removed the purple cloak and put His own clothes back on Him. Thus, this appears to be a concession that the Romans made to the Jews at that time and place.

Think about all the irony here. Their bowing and paying “homage” to Jesus as King was all in mockery even though Jesus really was the King, not just of the Jews but of the Romans, as well.

These men had no idea what they were doing. Why, though, will their ignorance not excuse them on Judgment Day?

The Crucifixion

Read Mark 15:21–38. What terrible and painful irony appears in these passages?

At this point in the Passion Narrative, Jesus is a silent victim, controlled by people who are bent on His death. Throughout the Gospel, up to His arrest, He was the master of activities. Now He is acted upon. Though He was a robust itinerant preacher, the beating He had received and the lack of food and sleep wore Him down to where a stranger had to bear His cross.

At the cross His garments were removed and became the property of the soldiers, who cast lots to see whose they would be (*compare with Ps. 22:18*). Crucifixion was a fairly bloodless method of execution. The nails used to fasten a person to the cross (*compare with John 20:24–29*) were likely driven through the wrist below the palm where no major blood vessels run. (In both Hebrew and Greek, the word for “hand” can refer to both the hand and the forearm.) The palm of the hand itself does not have the structures necessary to carry the weight of the body in crucifixion. The median nerve runs through the center of the forearm and would be crushed by the nails, causing excruciating pain up the arm. Breathing was difficult. To get a good breath, victims of crucifixion had to push against their nailed feet and flex their arms, again causing agonizing pain. Exhaustion asphyxia was one of the possible causes of death.

Jesus received tremendous mockery and humiliation during His crucifixion. The Gospel of Mark has a revelation/secret motif in which Jesus typically calls for silence about who He is. Consequently, such Christological titles as “Lord,” “Son of God,” or “Christ” do not appear often in the narrative.

This element changes at the cross. He cannot be hidden. It is ironic that it is the religious leaders who use these titles in mocking Jesus. How these men are condemning themselves!

One of their mocking statements stands out. In Mark 15:31, they say, “He saved others; he cannot save himself” (*ESV*). To make their point about His helplessness on the cross, they indicate that He did help others (the Greek verb can mean “save,” “heal,” or “rescue”). Thus, ironically, they admit He is the Savior. The irony goes further—the reason He could not, or would not, save Himself was because at the cross He was saving others.

Read John 1:1–3, and then think about what this passage tells us about Jesus, the same Jesus who is being crucified here in Mark. How do we wrap our minds around what Christ’s death means for us?

Forsaken by God

Read Mark 15:33–41. What are Jesus’ only words on the cross in Mark? What does Christ’s death ultimately mean for us all?

The Gospel of Mark presents the cross as a very dark place, both physically and spiritually. A supernatural darkness descended on Calvary from about noon on that Friday until about 3 p.m. “And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour” (*Mark 15:33, ESV*).

The words of Jesus on the cross are called the “cry of dereliction” as He prays, crying out to God, asking why He has been forsaken. He is quoting from Psalm 22:1. Other references to the same psalm occur in Mark 15:24, 29, indicating that the Scriptures are being fulfilled in the death of Jesus. Even in the evil plotting of men, the will of God is being fulfilled.

Jesus’ words from the cross are reported in Aramaic along with translation. The words “my God, my God” are *Eloi, Eloi* in the verse (a transliteration of the Aramaic *’elahi*). It would be easy to hear Jesus as calling for Elijah (Aramaic *’eliyyah*, which means “My God is YHWH”). This is the mistake that some bystanders make.

What becomes striking about this passage is the parallel it has to the baptism of Jesus in Mark 1:9–11.

The Baptism: Mark 1:9–11	The Cross: Mark 15:34–39
John baptizes Jesus	Jesus’ baptism (<i>compare with Mark 10:38</i>)
John (Elijah figure; <i>see Mark 9:11–13</i>)	Calling Elijah
Heavens split	Veil split
Spirit (<i>pneuma</i>)	Jesus expires (<i>expneō</i>)
God’s voice “Beloved Son”	Centurion says “Son of God”

What these parallels suggest is that as the baptism of Jesus in Mark 1 is the beginning of His ministry, as prophesied in Daniel 9:24–27, what occurs in Mark 15 at the cross is the culmination, or goal, of His ministry, as He dies as a ransom for many (*Mark 10:45*). The death of Jesus on the cross also fulfills part of the prophecy of Daniel 9:24–27. The tearing of the temple veil (*Mark 15:38*) points to the fulfillment of the sacrificial system, as type meets antitype, and a new phase of salvation history begins.

Even despite the evil plotting of humanity, God’s purposes were fulfilled. Why should this help us learn that, regardless of what happens around us, we can still trust God and know that His goodness will ultimately prevail?

Laid to Rest

Read Mark 15:42–47. What is the significance of Joseph of Arimathea’s intervention, especially since all of Jesus’ disciples were nowhere to be seen?

After all that drama, the more “mundane” things happen next. For starters, dead people always have to be buried. But several factors in what follows are quite touching spiritually, and others are extremely important historically.

In this passage, Joseph of Arimathea appears for the first and last time in the Gospel of Mark. He was a respected member of the Sanhedrin and one of the “urban elites.” As a wealthy and respected man, he had standing with the governor, which explains how he could dare approach Pilate and ask for the body of Jesus. It is a touching detail that a member of the council took such interest in Jesus’ burial. Meanwhile, where were Jesus’ trusted disciples in all this?

One historical detail of extreme importance here is the verification of the death of Jesus. Mark 15:43 tells of Joseph’s request for the body of Jesus. But Pilate was surprised to hear that Jesus already was dead (*Mark 15:44*). He, therefore, summoned the centurion in charge of the crucifixion and asked if Jesus was dead already. The centurion confirmed that it was so.

This is important because of the later claim by some that Jesus did not die on the cross but only fainted. The testimony of the centurion to the Roman governor directly counters that assertion. The Romans did, after all, know how to execute criminals.

Joseph brought a linen shroud to wrap Jesus, and he laid His body in a tomb hewn from rock. This tomb was large enough to walk into (*Mark 16:5*). Along with Joseph, the Gospel writer notes two women who saw the location—Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of Jesus. These two, along with Salome, watched the Crucifixion from a distance; all three will go to the tomb on Sunday morning with the intention to complete their work of embalming Jesus (*Mark 16:1*).

Why the reference to these three women? They will be the witnesses to the empty tomb in Mark 16 and thus are important witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus.

How ironic that Jesus’ followers are “missing in action” while a member of the Sanhedrin, the very body that condemned Jesus, becomes the “hero” here. How can we be sure that, in crucial times, we are not missing in action either?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “In Pilate’s Judgment Hall,” pp. 723–740; “Calvary,” pp. 741–757; “‘It Is Finished,’” pp. 758–764, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“Pilate longed to deliver Jesus. But he saw that he could not do this, and yet retain his own position and honor. Rather than lose his worldly power, he chose to sacrifice an innocent life. How many, to escape loss or suffering, in like manner sacrifice principle. Conscience and duty point one way, and self-interest points another. The current sets strongly in the wrong direction, and he who compromises with evil is swept away into the thick darkness of guilt.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 738.

“Upon Christ as our substitute and surety was laid the iniquity of us all. He was counted a transgressor, that He might redeem us from the condemnation of the law. The guilt of every descendant of Adam was pressing upon His heart. The wrath of God against sin, the terrible manifestation of His displeasure because of iniquity, filled the soul of His Son with consternation. All His life Christ had been publishing to a fallen world the good news of the Father’s mercy and pardoning love. Salvation for the chief of sinners was His theme. But now with the terrible weight of guilt He bears, He cannot see the Father’s reconciling face. The withdrawal of the divine countenance from the Saviour in this hour of supreme anguish pierced His heart with a sorrow that can never be fully understood by man. So great was this agony that His physical pain was hardly felt.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 753.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Look at how central the theology of substitution was to Ellen G. White and also to the Bible (*see, for instance, Isaiah 53*). Why is any theology that downplays the central role of substitution and Christ’s dying in our stead, paying in Himself the penalty for our sins, a false theology?
- 2 Who or what is the “Barabbas” in today’s world that gets asked for instead of Jesus?
- 3 What should the story of Joseph of Arimathea tell us about not judging outward appearances?
- 4 Review Daniel 9:24–27. Why should you be able to give a Bible study on this section to anyone who asks? Can you?

Bringing Armenia to Christ

By ANDREW MCCHESEY

While Anush was praying for her father, she also was praying for the other 4,000 residents of her town in Armenia. Then God began to touch hearts.

After her baptism, Anush met regularly with two other young women to pray for the town. Then they organized seminars that attracted several dozen young people. After that, with assistance from the Euro-Asia Division, they chartered buses and took groups of 50 young people on sightseeing tours around Armenia. Church members greeted and befriended the young people at every stop. Anush saw that the young people became more sincere and open in their questions about God when visiting places far from home.

As interest in the Adventist message grew, a pastor started to visit the town every other Sunday to hold talks about relationships, finances, and other practical issues. Many people attended the meetings over two years.

Father was influential and respected, so when he became a Seventh-day Adventist, the whole town took notice. People began to talk about faith and his decision to go to a church that was not the national church. His baptism broke the ice. The town's Adventist church, which once consisted of seven faithful women meeting in a private home, has now moved into a rented hall where dozens of people gather every Sabbath. Church members and others also meet online to pray daily. Plans are under way to buy a church building.

Today, Father, whose name is Armen Safaryan, works together with his wife, Gayane Badalyan, and daughter, Anush Safaryan, to make three kinds of tofu at their company. As the only tofu company in Armenia, it has been featured on national television, and Father had an opportunity to share his faith when asked why he makes tofu.

Father is a church elder and leader of the family ministries department, and he and Mother, who runs the church's health ministries department, are in high demand at other churches. Father is seen as a role model in a country where many mothers and children still go to church without their husbands and fathers. Father, Mother, and Anush want to change that.

"See, this normal Armenian man is an Adventist," church leaders say in introducing Father at speaking engagements. "Men, you are not alone. This man goes to church on Sabbath."



Anush shares her story at churches and youth camps, saying, "Do not be satisfied with your husbands and fathers just allowing you to go to church. Plead with God for them to go with you."

Part of last quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering went to open a center of influence for families in Yerevan, Armenia. Thank you for helping spread the gospel with your offerings.