

united kingdom

Jesus' Arrest
and Trial

The Kingdom story from creation to revelation

Jesus' Arrest and Trial

Introduction

Jesus and his closest followers had been having a meal together. Judas had left the room while Jesus was talking to his followers. When Jesus was finished talking, he and his followers went to a garden to pray.

John 18:1-3

Judas knew this place because Jesus had often gone there with his followers. Judas arrived there with soldiers armed with blazing torches, lanterns, and weapons...

John 18:4-5, 10-11

Jesus fully realised all that was going to happen to him, so he stepped forward to meet them. "Who are you looking for?" he asked.

"Jesus..." they replied.

"I AM he," Jesus said...

Matthew 26:57-67

They led Jesus to the home of...the man in charge of the religious leaders, where the...other leaders had gathered...Inside, they were trying to find witnesses who would lie about Jesus, so they could put him to death...Finally, they found two men who would bring a charge against Jesus. Then the head religious leader stood up and said to Jesus, "Well, aren't you going to answer these charges?..." But Jesus remained silent. Then the head religious leader said to him, "I demand in the name of the living God that you tell us whether you are the Promised King, the Son of God." Jesus replied, "Yes, it is as you say..." Then the head religious leader tore his clothing to show his horror, and shouted, "...Why do we need other witnesses? You have all heard him dishonour God with his words..." Then they began to spit in Jesus' face and beat him with their fists...

Matthew 27:1-2, Luke 23:2

Early in the morning, the religious leaders met again to discuss how to persuade the government to sentence Jesus to death. Then they bound him...and

took him to...the...governor, where they said that Jesus was claiming to be a king.

John 18:33, 36-38

The governor asked Jesus..."Are you the king of these people?"...Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not from here. If it were, my followers would fight for me." The governor said, "So you are a king?" Jesus responded, "You say correctly that I am a king. Actually, I was born and came into the world to show everyone the truth. All who love the truth recognise that what I say is true." "What is truth?" the governor asked, and then he left Jesus.

John 19:1-3

The governor had Jesus flogged with a lead-tipped whip. The soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and they put a purple robe on him. "Hail, oh King!" they mocked, as they slapped him across the face.

John 19:8, 10-16

The governor told the people, "...understand clearly that I find him not guilty," and he had Jesus led out in front of the people. But the people insisted that Jesus be executed, so the governor spoke to Jesus again..."You need to answer the charges against you...Don't you realise that I have the power to release you or execute you?"

Then Jesus said, "You would have no power over me at all unless it was given to you from God himself..." The governor went back to the people to try to convince them that he should release Jesus, but they were insistent..."Execute him, execute him," they shouted...Finally because the governor was afraid of the people, he turned Jesus over to them to be executed.

TELLING THE STORY

Why this story?

Jesus is betrayed and accused, and he fulfils scripture by being unjustly tried and convicted without saying anything. However, it becomes obvious that he is a king...of a different sort.

Judas takes the religious leaders to Jesus, and Jesus is arrested and tried by the religious authorities. Just as Isaiah foretold, Jesus is falsely accused. However, he admits to being the Promised King. When Jesus is taken to the Roman government authorities, he explains more about his kingdom, impressing the governor so much that the governor cannot find a reason to have him executed. Nevertheless, the people (God's people!) press the governor until he hands Jesus over to be executed. Therefore, as Isaiah had said, Jesus is humiliated, scorned, and led away to be executed like a common criminal.

Key concepts to include in your story

- Judas brings the soldiers to Jesus in order to arrest him. They are armed.
- Jesus steps forward and says who he is.
- All the religious leaders are at the home of the man in charge of them. Jesus is brought there.
- The religious leaders try to find people to accuse Jesus falsely, and finally find two men.
- When asked to answer the charges, Jesus says nothing.
- Jesus is asked if he is the Promised King, and he admits to it, which causes the religious leaders to spit in Jesus' face and hit him.
- The religious leaders take Jesus to the Roman governor, who can legally have him executed, and present their charge that Jesus was claiming to be king.
- The governor asks Jesus if he is a king.
- Jesus says yes
 - But his kingdom is not of this world, or his followers would fight for him
 - He came to show truth
- Jesus is flogged and a crown of thorns and robe of purple is put on him. He is mocked.
- The governor takes Jesus to the people and says that he finds no guilt in him.
- The people insist on his execution
- The governor asks Jesus to refute the charges against him.
- Jesus says that the governor has no authority over him except what God has given him.
- The governor tries to free Jesus, but the people are insistent on his death.
- The governor is afraid of the people, and so he turns Jesus over to be executed.

Notes about how the story was crafted

Judas arrived in the garden (of Gethsemane, see Matthew 26:36) with soldiers and Temple guards that the religious leaders had given him. We have simplified this to soldiers only for this story.

John 18:4-5 is included in this story to show that Jesus knew what was going to happen to him and willingly moved forward with it.

They took Jesus to the home of Caiaphas, the high priest at the time. (John's account records a first meeting with Annas, Caiaphas' father-in-law, but we have used Matthew's account for the purposes of this story. We know that Jesus stood before both men at different points that night.) We have described Caiaphas as **the man in charge of the religious leaders**, but you may use other equivalent expressions also, such as *head religious leader*. The religious leaders were the priests and teachers of religious law who imposed their strict teachings on the Jewish people.

The religious leaders had to orchestrate events and twist truth in order to find a way to have Jesus executed. According to Jewish law (Deut. 19:15), they needed corroborating evidence of 2 or more witnesses, and they needed evidence that would cause the Romans to want to execute Jesus. The religious leaders could neither find two people to give the same evidence, or all the evidence given was easily refuted. Finally, they found two men who said that Jesus said “I am able to destroy the Temple of God and rebuild it in three days.” Although Jesus had made similar statements (John 2:19), this accusation is a twisted version. Because in this story set we have not included a story with Jesus saying “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up,” we have simply said that two false witnesses made an untrue statement in the trial, giving the religious leaders a means to continue questioning Jesus until they found enough “evidence” to bring him before the Roman government.

In place of **Messiah** we have used **Promised King**. The title **Messiah** would have been understood by the original audience as referring to God’s anointed savior, or king, that he had promised the Jews for hundreds of years.

Blasphemy is a term your audience may not understand, so we have said it in simpler terms—**dishonour God with his words**.

We have included Luke 23:2 in this story because it explicitly states that the religious leaders told the governor that Jesus was claiming to be king. The other accounts only imply this, and we wanted to ensure that our audience understood this fact.

We have not named the governor, Pilate, so that this story will be easier to remember. However, if you want to use his name, feel free.

We have included the word **correctly** in John 18:37 of the NASB version of the Bible in order to make it clear that Jesus was claiming his kingship.

We have omitted Barabbas’ release and simplified the ending in order to simplify the story and focus on its main points.

We have used the more modern term **execute** instead of **crucify**.

DISCUSSION POINTS

Retelling the story

As your group practises retelling the story, help them see the different scenes in the story.

- Set the scene: Judas has left to betray Jesus and Jesus and his followers have gone to a garden to pray.
- Jesus is arrested
 - Soldiers come with Judas
 - Jesus steps forward
- Jesus before the religious leaders
- Transition to governor
- Jesus before the governor
 - Jesus tells him that he is a king and that he shows truth
 - the governor has him flogged
 - crown of thorns and robe of purple
 - the governor tries to set him free
- Jesus and the governor talk about who has authority
- The people insist on execution and the governor hands Jesus over to be executed

Questions for discussion

You don't have to ask all of these questions in your discussion times. These questions are discussion starters, but you will find that often, once people feel comfortable, they talk about many of these things naturally. However, these questions are helpful to keep a conversation going where needed, and they provide a logical sequence of working through the story. Even if you don't ask all the questions in a group, try to ask people what this story means for them personally. You'll find that as you continue to interact with God's Word at a deep level, God's Spirit will reveal things for your life in a wonderful way!

- What do you like about this story?
- What bothered you about this story?
- What does this story show you about God?
- What does this story show you about people?
- What does this story mean for your life? How will you live your life differently having learned this story?
- How will you remember this story? *(Tell it!)*
- Is there anyone you would like to tell this story to? Or anyone you would like to practice with? E.g. Your children, your best friend, your wife, your husband, a mum at the school gate, your work colleague, your neighbour. (It's true that the best way to learn a story is to tell it. So why don't you give it a go and chat to each other next week about how you found it?)
- How does this story contribute to our understanding of the Gospel? How is this story part of the Gospel?

Questions people may have

This section can never be exhaustive. Remember that during your group discussion times, you want to focus on the above questions rather than get sidetracked by deeply academic issues. Part of the joy of experiencing and studying God's Word in this way is allowing God's Spirit to teach us and reveal His truth to us through the narrative of the individual stories, and ultimately through the narrative of the larger story line. However, we understand that sometimes people feel they need some deeper answers. Sometimes, the storyline has to speak for itself, and we have to trust it to do so. However, if your group needs some deeper answers in order to go on, here are some basics that you can discuss. If you have unresolved questions, please come and ask, and we'll help you find the answers.

- How exactly was Jesus arrested when he was taken out of the garden? Why was he taken initially to the religious officials?
 - *The religious leaders were the ones initiating Jesus' arrest, even though they could not, according to Roman law, ultimately convict or sentence him. Festival times could provide an atmosphere for volatile situations as emotions were running high and many people were gathering together. It is likely that during these times the high priest and the governor cooperated with each other to ensure that uprisings did not occur. This was in both of their best interests. It is possible that the high priest asked for help from the governor to bring down an insurgent and received some Roman forces to help.*
- Why did it take so long to find someone to lie about Jesus? What did they finally accuse him of?
 - *In the Jewish culture two corroborating witnesses were needed in order to accuse someone. When the religious leaders finally found two men who gave the same twisted version of a statement Jesus had made, they asked Jesus to answer the charges. When he would not, they then asked him a more fundamental question about his identity. As Jesus answered the question about his identity as the "Promised King", he gave the religious leaders enough to charge him with blasphemy according to Jewish belief. However, Jewish religious charges would hardly hold up in a Roman court of law, and the religious leaders could not execute someone on their own. Therefore, the religious leaders twisted the meaning of what Jesus said to say that Jesus was claiming to be king (implying a political role)—enough of a charge that Pilate would at least listen to their accusations and consider execution.*
- Why did the religious leader tear his clothes?
 - *Tearing clothing was a traditional gesture of mourning and a way to dissociate oneself from what has been said. When the head religious leader tore his clothing he was showing just how seriously he considered Jesus'*

blasphemy, especially as religious law did not permit the head religious leader to tear his clothing to mourn even a close relative.

- How did execution work in that culture? Why couldn't the Jewish religious leaders execute Jesus themselves?
 - *The Roman governors usually allowed the conquered peoples to follow most of their own laws, although the Roman authorities maintained supreme power. Evidence indicates that the Jewish people did not possess the right to put someone to death, although there seem to be exceptions, as in the case of the stoning of Stephen in Acts.*
- How is it that the governor was afraid of the people? Why wasn't he in control of them?
 - *Pilate, the Roman governor, or "prefect" of Judea, was not liked by the Jewish people. He had a history of treating them badly and with excessive force. He offended their beliefs by bringing in military insignia bearing the emperor's image, and also misused Temple money. It is surprising that he would accommodate their request to crucify Jesus, but in this case he unexpectedly gave in. It is believed by some historians that Jesus' crucifixion happened during a time that Pilate was concerned for his job because of allegations that he was not doing it well. (In fact, we know that Pilate was removed from his position shortly afterwards in 36AD.) The charge against Jesus—that he claimed to be king—was one that the Jews could use against Pilate to Caesar to claim that Pilate was allowing insurgency in Judea. John records what is believed to be a veiled threat to that effect in John 19:15. Pilate may have been concerned by the threat and so gave in. However, the charge that Jesus was claiming to be king was very weak and unsubstantiated, and would not normally have been strong enough to condemn him.*
- Why didn't Jesus speak in his own defence?
 - *The simplest answer to this is that it was prophesied hundreds of years ago by Isaiah that Jesus would not speak in his defence. Jesus had not come to defend himself against an accusation; in fact, he knew what was coming and was going towards it willingly. But when he was asked a more fundamental question about his identity as the Promised King—the "Messiah"—he admitted who he was.*
- Where were the 12 closest followers of Jesus?
 - *Matthew 26:56 tells us that as soon as Jesus was arrested, all the followers deserted him and fled. We do know that one of them, Peter, followed the contingent to the high priest's house and stayed at a distance. Peter denied his relationship with Jesus later that night.*