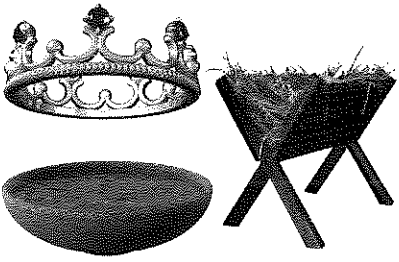


One Story: Arrest and Trial



Topic

Jesus' arrest and trial

Theme

Jesus willingly chose to subject Himself to injustice, humiliation, and physical abuse on His way to the cross.

Desired Learner Response

The learner will show his appreciation for Christ's willingness to go to the cross by being willing to serve the Lord in sacrificial ways.

Materials

- Resources 1 and 14

Scripture Focus

Matt. 26:57–68; 27:1, 2, 11–31; Mark 14:53–65; 15:1–20;
Luke 22:54, 63–71; 23:1–25

Summary

This lesson focuses on the time between Jesus' arrest and His walk to the cross. Neither the religious nor the civil trials were just. Jesus' demeanor, attitude, and answers serve as models for believers today who face rivalry, opposition, or hatred.

Outline

I. Betrayal and Arrest

II. Jewish Trials

- A. Annas
- B. Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin
 1. Search for witnesses
 2. Christ's claim

III. Civil Trials

- A. Before Pilate
- B. Before Herod Antipas
- C. Acquitted by Pilate
- D. Last interview by Pilate

Memory Verse

*"He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth:
he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep
before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth" (Isaiah 53:7).*

GETTING STARTED

Kangaroo Court

Kangaroo court is a term used to describe a mock court in which principles of law and justice are ignored in order to bring about a desired outcome. The term *kangaroo court* is of uncertain origin, though some etymologists have offered theories.

Have the learners form groups of four or five. Have each group come up with their own theory as to how the term *kangaroo court* came about. Give them a few minutes to think and then share their ideas. The purpose of this exercise is mainly to get the learners thinking about unjust courts.

Some etymologists theorize that *kangaroo court* came out of the Gold Rush in 1849 in which hasty trials were used to deal with claim jumpers. Others suggest that the term comes from the process of *leaping* over justice in order to come to a verdict.

ASK: How might you respond if you were wrongly accused of a crime and then taken to a kangaroo court for trial? (Q1)

ASK: What might motivate people to conduct a kangaroo court? (Q2)

Extreme animosity toward a defendant they believe would be found innocent if his trial was conducted justly.

Jesus' trials before His crucifixion were essentially conducted in a kangaroo court. Jesus' response, or lack of thereof, to the trials tells us a lot about His willingness to submit to God and finish His mission.

Influential Trials

ASK: List three famous courtroom dramas (real or fictional) from our society's history.

ASK: What influence have these dramas had on our society's view of law and justice?

In this session we'll look at the courtroom drama of Jesus' trials, investigate the lack of law and justice in them, and consider the influence the trials should have on our understanding of Christ and His mission.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

I. Betrayal and Arrest

READ: Luke 6:6–11; 11:53, 54; 13:31; 19:47. **ASK:** What did the religious and political leaders want to do with Jesus? (Q3) *Put Him to death to snuff out His influence.*

The Pharisees had been planning Jesus' death for many months. His arrest in

Gethsemane took place in the middle of the night because they feared the pilgrims from Galilee, who were in Jerusalem for Passover. Jesus' enemies wanted a quick trial and execution before the people could protest. As such, Jesus' trial was not held to determine His guilt or innocence, but as a conspiracy to assassinate Him.

READ: Matthew 26:47. **ASK:** What must the crowd have believed about Jesus' power if they thought they could apprehend Him with swords and clubs? (Q4) *That Jesus' ability to resist arrest was limited by His human strength and the number of friends He had with Him.*

How silly the crowd must have looked from Jesus' perspective. They had no idea Who He really was and all the power He had at His disposal.

Judas boldly betrayed Jesus, giving Him a kiss and calling Him *Rabbi* (26:48, 49). He apparently had no amount of hesitation or regret at this time. Perhaps the money he was making and the power of having the multitude follow him excited him. John's Gospel says that Jesus voluntarily identified Himself (John 18:4–8). At this the crowd fell back in disbelief. They must have been expecting to have to fight to arrest Jesus. Perhaps some of them were a little disappointed that the process was nearly uneventful. Peter was the only one to swing a sword. He cut off a man's ear, but Jesus healed the victim (Luke 22:50, 51).

Judas later regretted betraying the Lord. He returned the money and hung himself (Matt. 27:3–5).

READ: Luke 22:50, 51. **ASK:** What did Jesus demonstrate by healing the victim's ear? (Q5) *That He cared for His enemies, that He was far more powerful than the crowd believed He was, and that He was not going to resist arrest.*

Jesus also pointed out that He could have called on the Father to give Him twelve legions of angels (Matt. 26:52, 53), that's 72,000 angels (6,000 angels for Jesus and each disciple). The word *give* is a military term. It means *to place by the side or to post on one's flank*. The idea is that the angels standing by were ready to fight as an army. If they were summoned, no human mob would dare fight them.

Jesus had already asked that the mob leave His disciples alone (John 18:8, 9). He even said He would not lose any of those who were His, a reference to the disciples (cf. 6:39; 17:12). Jesus, perfectly aware of the prophecies of the Old Testament, told the multitudes the events transpiring were a fulfillment of prophecy (Matt. 26:54–56; cf. Zech. 13:7).

Zechariah 13:7 shows God the Father's will was for Jesus to die.

But both Jesus' authority to call thousands of angels and His assurance of His disciples' safety was somewhat lost on the disciples. The dangerous, sword and club-wielding mob was right in front of them. They fled as the mob bound Jesus and took Him away (Matt. 26:56). Peter ran far enough away to watch from a distance, but he later denied the Lord (Mark 14:66–72). Another young man, possibly John Mark, followed Jesus but fled when an attempt was made to apprehend him (14:51, 52).

ASK: What must we conclude about Jesus' willingness to be arrested? (Q6) *That Jesus went out of His way to demonstrate that the arrest was happening because He was allowing it to happen. No one could take Jesus against His will.*

During His arrest Jesus was not informed of any charge against Him; that was yet to be determined in a secret meeting. This was the first of many legal irregularities.

II. Jewish Trials

A. Annas

Though Annas is no longer the high priest, he is still called by that title (John 18:19, 22).

Jesus was taken first to Annas presumably at the ruler's residence (John 18:13). Annas had been high priest and continued to maintain authority. His five sons followed him in that office, and the current high priest was Caiaphas, his son-in-law. Annas's residence may have been near Gethsemane. That made it convenient and natural for him to examine Jesus before sending Him on to Caiaphas. Annas's high influence and power probably warranted his opportunity to examine Jesus first.

The synoptic Gospels don't record Annas's interaction with Jesus. John records that Annas asked Jesus about His disciples and doctrine (18:19–24). Jesus told Annas to ask those who listened to His public teaching. His doctrine was no secret. Jesus was simply pointing out that Annas was not following the Jewish laws. He should have had witnesses to testify against Jesus instead of asking Jesus to incriminate Himself. Nevertheless, an officer took umbrage at Jesus' answer and struck Him for speaking in such a manner to Annas. Jesus questioned why He was being struck when He had not spoken any evil. Annas then sent Jesus to Caiaphas.

B. Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin

1. Search for witnesses

While Annas examined Jesus, word went out to selected members of the Sanhedrin to meet at the palace of Caiaphas, the current high priest. Those among the council who might show favor to Jesus or care about legal forms (e.g., Joseph of Arimathaea) were not called. The meeting took place around 3:00 a.m., even though Jewish law prohibited such a meeting.

This council finally found two witnesses to testify after many false witnesses proved unhelpful (Matt. 26:59–61; Mark 14:55–59). The members of the court made no attempt to establish the credibility of the witnesses, who were not even put under oath. The witnesses testified simultaneously, but their testimonies did not agree (Mark 14:56). They both misunderstood and misquoted what Jesus said about destroying and rebuilding the temple (Matt. 26:61; Mark 14:58). Of course Jesus was speaking about His body, not the actual temple (John 2:19–21). Ironically, the saying the Sanhedrin used to try to condemn Jesus was meant as a figure of speech for Christ's death and resurrection. Jesus' disciples understood the figure of speech after Christ's resurrection (John 2:22). Despite the witnesses' contradictory testimonies, the Sanhedrin did not punish them. The Sanhedrin's total focus was to manufacture a reason to give Jesus a death sentence (Matt. 26:59). They cared little about procedure and trial laws, signs of a kangaroo court.

2. Christ's claim

After the false witness failed, Jesus was made to give incriminating claims about Himself even though in Jewish law a voluntary confession was inadmissible as evidence. The blasphemy charge against Him was based on His statement, *Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven* (Matt. 26:64; cf. Mark 14:62),

READ: Matthew 26:63, 64. **ASK:** In what sense did Jesus help the Sanhedrin find a reason to sentence Him to death? (Q7) *He claimed deity, a truth that He knew the Sanhedrin didn't believe.*

ASK: Whom did the Sanhedrin actually condemn with their verdict, Jesus or themselves? **Explain.** (Q8) *They condemned themselves for not believing that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. They were the ones who stood condemned.*

For a mere man to claim to be the Son of Man was blasphemy, an insult, an act of contempt toward God, and, under Jewish law, punishable by death (Exod. 20:1–7; Lev. 24:11–16). The council never considered it possible that Jesus was telling the truth about Himself! He did not fit their expectations of the Messiah; His message contradicted much that they held dear. Had they allowed a defense, with witnesses of His miracles and testimony from the disciples, they might have realized that Jesus was not blaspheming. In fact, they were blaspheming by denying God's Son.

According to Jewish law, the death sentence could not be carried out until twenty-four hours had passed; however, the Sanhedrin ignored that consideration. The council announced an immediate verdict, including the punishment: *He is guilty of death* (Matt. 26:66; Mark 14:64). No one spoke up with a word of defense or outcry against injustice—or even with pity.

Jesus understood perfectly what was going on. He allowed Himself to be condemned so that He might make a way for His condemners to find forgiveness of sin and enjoy eternal life. Remember that He died for the sins of the Sanhedrin as much as He died for our sins. Jesus surely made the connection between the sins of His condemners and His suffering. He was dying for those who spit on Him, hit Him, scourged Him, mocked Him, and beat Him.

READ: Matthew 26:67, 68. **ASK:** What hurt Jesus more, the blows of his accusers' fists or the weight of His accusers' sins as He hung on the cross? **Explain.** (Q9) *The weight of the sin of the world, including the sins of Jesus' accusers, was far harder to endure than the pain he felt from His accusers' fists.*

The beatings Jesus received were supposed to prove He was not the Son of God. The Sanhedrin believed that the true Son of God would never allow any man to abuse Him. But the members of the Sanhedrin were wrong. They failed to understand that Jesus was fulfilling Isaiah's prophecies as the Lamb of God (Isaiah 50:6; 53:7). They thought Jesus was helpless, but in reality it was the Sanhedrin along with the rest of the world who stood helpless. Christ was the only help for humanity's lost condition. He willingly died on the cross to be the help and hope for all.

The council declared a short recess until dawn, when it would meet again, according to the letter of the law, to ratify the verdict and sentence. Luke records what seems to be a synopsis of the events that transpired in the morning (Luke 22:66–71). The Sanhedrin's basis for condemning Christ remained blasphemy. Their next move was to get the Roman governor, Pilate, to review the case and to secure his approval for Jesus' crucifixion. The Jews were not allowed to carry out the execution on their own.

III. Civil Trials

A. Before Pilate

As soon as possible the Jewish leaders met with Pilate in the open court rather than in the judgment hall inside the governor's palace (John 18:28, 29). Pilate, irritated by this hasty court session called so early in the morning, felt in no mood to be conciliatory. The Jews and the Romans felt a mutual hatred, and he wanted to get the business over as soon as possible.

Pilate asked, What is the charge? The Jewish officials evaded a straight answer because they knew Pilate would not care whether Jesus blasphemed the Jewish religion. They hinted that he could waive his right to hold the trial and allow them to proceed even though they were seeking the death sentence (John 18:29–31).

The Jews knew that if Pilate did not allow them to try the case and fix the punishment, they had to have an accusation that would stand up under Roman law. So, forgetting the charge agreed upon in their own court (blasphemy), they offered a new set of accusations, again without a formal arraignment or credible witnesses.

READ: Luke 23:2. **ASK:** What did the Jews accuse Jesus of doing? (Q10) *The Jews charged Jesus with trying to overthrow the Jewish nation, forbidding Jews to pay taxes, and planning to set Himself up as king.*

The accusation that Jesus was trying to make Himself a king was the one that would have concerned Pilate the most. Pilate took Jesus into the judgment hall to talk with Him undisturbed. There he asked, *Art thou the King of the Jews?* (Luke 23:3). Jesus said, *Thou sayest it* (Luke 23:3). With His answer, Jesus implied He was a king while also putting the issue back in Pilate's court. John adds that Jesus said His kingdom is not of this world. He had led no riots or revolutions but was a witness of the truth (John 18:36, 37). Pilate saw no threat to Rome in the discussions about Jewish religions or philosophical questions. He announced to the crowd assembled in the open court, *I find no fault in this man* (Luke 23:4). According to this declaration of Jesus' innocence, He should have been released.

Encouraged by members of the Sanhedrin, the mob cried out that Jesus had been stirring up a rebellion (Luke 23:5). This disturbance became so widespread that Pilate realized he had no ordinary trial before him.

READ: Mark 15:3–5. **ASK:** Why would Jesus not respond to the accusations of starting a rebellion as well as the other accusations made by chief priests? (Q11) *By His silence Jesus demonstrated His willingness to go to the cross. His was not trying to defend Himself, win His case, and escape death.*

When the crowd identified Galilee as a site of the alleged rebellion, Pilate saw a way to rid himself of the responsibility. Herod, tetrarch of Galilee, was in Jerusalem for the celebration of Passover. Since Jesus came from Galilee, Pilate quickly sent Jesus to the palace, where Herod stayed when in Jerusalem (Luke 23:5–7).

B. Before Herod Antipas

Herod was the unprincipled scoundrel who had had John the Baptist behead-

ed at the request of his stepdaughter. Considering Jesus a prophet and a worker of miracles, Herod hoped that Jesus would do a miracle to free Himself.

READ: Luke 23:8. **ASK:** What three words would you use to describe Herod in this verse? (Q12) *Clueless, self-centered, incongruous.*

Though Herod asked Jesus many questions, and though the chief priests and scribes had followed Jesus there to continue their accusations, Jesus again said nothing (Luke 23:8, 9).

The soldiers quickly noticed Herod's disinterest in Jesus, except as a source of amusement, and his disappointment that this *miracle worker* had refused to do any miracles or give any prophecies. Since Jesus Himself provided no amusement, the soldiers dressed Him in an elegant robe and ridiculed the idea of His being a king. When they had finished their sport, they followed their orders and led Him back to the judgment hall (23:10, 11).

Pilate had sent Jesus to Herod, expecting Herod to hear the accusations, evaluate the evidence, and announce a verdict. But Herod had merely wanted to satisfy his curiosity. Nothing in Scripture suggests that Herod talked to Jesus about the specific charges. When Jesus remained silent before him, Herod's curiosity faded, and he sent Jesus back to Pilate.

C. Acquitted by Pilate

Jesus returned to Pilate, who again announced that he found no evidence of crime and that Jesus should be released (Luke 23:13–17).

Caught between his own desire to release Jesus and the mounting pressure from the mob for him to pronounce Jesus guilty, Pilate sought ways to satisfy the crowd and his conscience. He was trying to stay neutral in a situation that called for a firm decision on the basis of truth. He called vainly, *Will you that I release unto you the King of the Jews?* (Mark 15:9, 10). The chief priests circulated the idea that Pilate should release Barabbas, a known murderer and insurrectionist. They stirred the crowd to cry out for the release of Barabbas, a man who had actually done all that Christ was accused of! Pilate washed his hands as though that would remove his responsibility and guilt (Mark 15:11–14; Matt. 27:24, 25).

D. Last interview by Pilate

The Jews who responded to Pilate's last defense of Jesus reminded the governor that Jesus had said He is the Son of God (John 19:7). Remembering his wife's dream (Matt. 27:19), Pilate became frightened. He asked Jesus where He was from (19:8, 9). Jesus gave Him no answer. Pilate was flustered, but Jesus remained calm and in control throughout the entire proceedings.

It was ironic that Pilate should declare, *I have power . . . to release thee* (John 19:10); he had been trying yet had failed at every turn.

READ: John 19:10, 11. **ASK:** What does John record that helps us in our understanding of Jesus as He neared the suffering of the cross? (Q13) *Jesus was not a victim in a scheme or the subject of a sinister plot; Jesus was living in perfect obedience to the Father's will.*

Flogging involved whipping the victim's bare back and legs with leather strips studded with sharp objects. The result was extreme trauma to the victim's body. Many victims died as a result of flogging. Jesus was so disfigured by the whipping that He was nearly unrecognizable (Isa. 52:14).

The Jewish leaders, not to be denied the victory within their grasp, found another weak spot to exploit in Pilate's character. They reminded him that if he released Jesus, Caesar would hear of it and that they would emphasize Jesus' claim to be a king (John 19:12). Caesar wanted no rivals, and Pilate would suffer if he helped one. Pilate surrendered his legal convictions to the threat to his position; he had Jesus flogged and then handed Him over for crucifixion (Matt. 27:26; Mark 15:15).

READ: Matthew 26:31, 56. **ASK:** Who stood with Jesus Christ during those hours of lies and abuse? (Q14) *No one.*

MAKING IT PERSONAL

RESOURCE: Display resource 14 as you make this lesson personal.

Ready to Do God's Will

Nothing could stop Jesus from going to the cross. It was the Father's will, and Jesus had fully submitted to the Father. Jesus was ready and willing to do the Father's will.

ASK: How would you describe your readiness to do God's will? (Q15)

ASK: What is your response to Jesus' humbleness as He endured ridicule and agony on the way to the cross? (Q16)

Encourage your learners to spend time evaluating their willingness to do God's will. Have them especially consider their willingness to suffer in carrying out God's will. Remind them that our desire to do God's will increases as we let God's Word affect our hearts. (Q17)

Appreciation for Jesus' Willingness

Give your learners an opportunity to share their appreciation for Jesus' willingness to go to the cross. Have them do so in the form of sentence prayers. (Q18)

Summary and Memory Verse

RESOURCE: Display resource 1. Add a summary statement for lesson 11 or use the following: Humbly submit to God's will.

Encourage learners to memorize Isaiah 53:7. Give them an opportunity to say the verse in class next week.

