

The Players in the Passion, by Social and Religious Status

WHY IS IT CALLED THE PASSION?

- “Passion” is from Latin *passio* “suffering.”
- We carry palms at Mass because today’s Mass commemorates Jesus’ arrival in Jerusalem for the Passover. As he enters the city on a donkey, a crowd waves palm branches and shouts “Hosanna” (Heb., “Save us, we beseech you”). When the Pharisees see this, they are convinced that “the world has gone after him” (John 12:12-19; also Mark 11:1-11/Matt. 21:1-11/Luke 19:28-38), and they see him as a zealot who threatens the established religious order. Their view of him is only hardened when Jesus then drives the merchants from the Temple.¹

TIME AND PLACE:

Time:

- Under the reign of tetrarch Herod Antipas (ruled 4 BCE–39 CE) and the governorship of Pontius Pilate (26–36 CE). The chronologies of Jesus’ birth in the Gospels do not yield a firm date. On the basis of historians such as Josephus (wrote ca. 90 CE) and the Gospels, scholars estimate that Jesus was born in about 6–4 BCE, entered his public ministry in about 24–28 CE, and was crucified at age 33 in about 27–31 CE.
- The sequence of events is most specific in the Synoptics, but in all four Gospels, the crucifixion takes place on the first day of Passover and the resurrection on the first day of the following week—Sunday. Thus, the disciples gather on a Thursday evening for what is now known as the Last Supper; overnight, Jesus prays at Gethsemane, where he is arrested; on Friday morning he is taken to Pilate; after three hours of darkness, Jesus dies at 3 p.m.; in the evening, Joseph of Arimathea takes his body to the tomb; on Saturday, the chief priests and Pharisees set a guard before the tomb (only in Matt. 27:62-66); and by dawn on Sunday (“After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning”), Jesus has been resurrected.

Place:

- Jerusalem, in the Roman province of Judea, formerly the kingdom of Israel, which had been ruled by Saul, David, and Solomon (ca. 1020–922 BCE); then split into Israel and Judah (922 BCE); then conquered by a succession of foreign empires until Alexander the Great (ca. 332 BCE), retaken by the Jewish Maccabees (164 BCE), and then conquered by the Romans (63 BCE).
- Pilate’s headquarters (John 18:28): “The praetorium, which included the governor’s residence, military barracks, and an outdoor courtyard used as a court of judgment

¹ For more on their fears about Jesus as a revolutionary, see Aslan, *Zealot*.

(19:13). The Roman governor of Judea resided in Caesarea, but because of the large crowd at Passover he came to Jerusalem to help keep order.”²

- [For more specifics, see maps of the Holy Land and Jerusalem in the PPT slides.]

TEMPLE OFFICIALS:

High priest (Caiaphas in Matt. 26:3/John 11:49; Annas in John 18:13):

- In theory, a hereditary lifetime position (see Num. 25:10-13), but in Jesus’ time the appointment was only temporary and had to be approved by the Roman regional governor. Even so, Caiaphas was high priest for 18 years (18 to 36/7 CE), and Annas for seven years (6-15 CE). In Acts 4:1-22, Peter and John are arrested while speaking before “the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees”; the next day they are brought to “their rulers, elder, and scribes,” with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas” and others of the “high-priestly family” for interrogation,” which suggests that former high priests maintained their authority. (In Acts 4, the high priest does not punish Peter and John because they have performed miracles and many have begun to follow them.)
- In Matt. 26:3, it is at the palace of Caiaphas that the chief priests and the elders determine to arrest and kill Jesus, but not during the pre-Passover festival because of their fear of a riot.

Chief priests:

- “High-ranking aristocratic temple priests who performed sacrifices and purification rites.”³
- With the elders, and scribes, they form the Sanhedrin, which is “the council of the city of Jerusalem, and probably the supreme council of Judea according to Mark (14:43, 53-55; 15:1).”⁴
- Together with the scribes and elders, the chief priests are Jesus’s chief adversaries in Matthew; for example, in Matt. 21:15, they resent Jesus’s performing healings in the Temple after driving out the moneychangers. In Luke 9:22: Jesus says, “The Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.”
- In Matt. 2:4, the chief priests and the scribes are consulted by Herod when the wise men (Gk. *magoi*) come from the East searching for “the child who has been born king of the Jews.” They tell Herod the Messiah is to be born in Bethlehem of Judea, alluding to Micah 5:2.

² Attridge et al., note to John 18:28.

³ Attridge et al., note to Matt. 2:4.

⁴ Attridge et al., note to Mark 8:31.

Scribes (Mark 14:1/Matt. 27:14/Luke 22:2):

- Scholars and bureaucrats in charge of Temple documents; also “professional interpreters of Jewish law.”⁵ In Matthew, they are together with the Pharisees against Jesus. However, in Matt. 13:52 Jesus praises the office of scribe; in 17:10 he credits the scribes with understanding a prophecy; in 23:2-3 he orders his disciples and the people to obey the scribes; and in Matt. 8:19 a scribe wants to follow Jesus.
- In Mark 1:22 Jesus teaches “as one having authority, and not as the scribes.”
- In Matt. 2:4, the scribes and chief priests are consulted by Herod when the wise men (Gk. *magoi*) come from the East searching for “the child who has been born king of the Jews.” They tell Herod the Messiah is to be born in Bethlehem of Judea, alluding to Micah 5:2.

Elders:

- “Senior lay leaders” of the Temple.⁶ The elders have power as officials of the Temple.
- Opponents of Jesus in the Synoptics.

Temple police, soldiers of the chief priests, and captain of the Temple (Luke 22:47)

- The police/soldiers kept order within the Temple precincts; the captain was second in command after the high priest.

JEWISH SECTS:

Pharisees:

- The word “Pharisee” is from Aramaic *prīšayyā*, plural of *prīš* “separated,” cognate with Hebrew *pārūš* “separatist, seceder,” in the sense of “one who is abstemious, self-denying.”⁷
- They were not priests but scholars.
- They split from the Hasmonean rulers descending from the Maccabees because of their secularization. “The Pharisees’ approach to the written Law of Moses was marked by a theory of a second, oral Law (supposedly also derived from Moses)” in whose light they would interpret the written Law; “their interpretations were... more innovative than those of the Sadducees, who remained conservatively restricted to the written Law.”⁸
- In contrast to the Sadducees, Pharisees believed in angels and in the resurrection of the body, both beliefs that became prominent after the exile in Babylon.
- Writing in the 90’s CE, Josephus (*Antiquities of the Jews* 18.1, *Jewish War* 2.8) says that in the early first century the Pharisees were the leading Jewish sect, which would explain why Jesus is more often in conflict with them than with the Sadducees.
- In John 18:3, Pharisees are among those who arrest Jesus in the garden, but otherwise they have no part in any of the Passion narratives except in Matt. 27:62, where they ask

⁵ Attridge et al., note to Mark 1:22.

⁶ Attridge et al., note to Mark 8:31.

⁷ *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “Pharisee.”

⁸ Brown, p. 77.

Pilate to place a guard around Jesus' tomb lest the disciples take the body and claim that Jesus was resurrected (Pilate demurs by saying that they have their own guard to do this).

- “Most frequently Jesus has been identified as a Pharisee on the assumption... that we know the views of the Pharisees in Jesus’ lifetime and they were like those later enunciated in the Mishna” [the “oral Torah” or laws originating in the 6th c. BCE], but the fact that the Gospels do not identify Jesus with any sect in Judaism probably reflects his challenges to Pharisees and Sadducees alike.⁹ Moreover, we should not assume that Judaism after the failed revolt and destruction of the Temple can be projected back to before this time.

Sadducees:

- The word “Sadducee” is from Hebrew *Ṣaddūqī*, possibly from the name *Ṣādūq* “Zadok” or from the *ṣādūq* “righteous.”¹⁰ If the former, then they thought of themselves as descended from Zadok, high priest during reigns of David and Solomon (1 Sam. 8:17, etc.), from whom the priests of the Captivity and later claim to be descended—thus they believed they were the purest of priests. They emerged in the Maccabean era, and in time became identified with the Greeks rather than with the Jews.¹¹
- Not mentioned in any Passion narrative; but their enmity to Jesus is well established before the Passion in the Synoptics. They are not mentioned in John.
- Writing in the 90’s CE, Josephus says ambiguously that the Sadducees were aristocrats somehow associated with the priesthood but who did not have special authority in the Temple (*Antiquities of the Jews* 13.297-8, 18:16-17; *Jewish War* 2.164-5).
- Little is known about them except what is in the Gospels, where they oppose the idea of bodily resurrection and the nascent Jesus movement (see e.g., Matt. 22:23; Acts 4:1).

ROMAN OFFICIALS:

Tiberias:

- Not mentioned in the Passion narratives, but Tiberias was the emperor (14-37 CE) during the public life of Jesus. Luke 3:1 places the call of John the Baptist in Tiberias’s 15th year, 28/29 CE.

Herod:

- Herod Antipas, son of Herod “the Great” (ruled 37-4 BCE)—whom the Romans had designated “King of the Jews”—was tetrarch of the northern Judean territories of Galilee and Perea. Herod Antipas had persuaded the Romans to grant him his father’s title as “King of the Jews.” As such, Herod was a “client king,” meaning that he ruled a limited territory under the authority of the Roman emperor. Herod the Great was responsible both for the Slaughter of the Innocents (Matt. 2:16-18) and for completing

⁹ Brown, p. 80.

¹⁰ *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “Sadducee.”

¹¹ See Brown, p. 76.

the reconstruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem; at his death, his kingdom was divided among his three sons: Archelaus (ruled Judea, Samaria, and Idumea, 4 BCE-6 CE); Herod Antipas (ruled Galilee and Perea, 4 BCE-39 CE); and Philip (ruled NE of Sea of Galilee, 4 BCE-33/34 CE).

Pilate:

- Governor of Judea, 26-36 CE. Josephus (*Jewish War* 2.9.2-4) says he was unpopular with the Jews because he flaunted Roman paganism in Jerusalem, unlike his predecessors; for this he was rebuked by Tiberias. His attack on Samaritans on Mt. Gerizim in 36 CE led to his being recalled to Rome, which he reached after Tiberias's death. Some early Church historians say that he later committed suicide by order of Caligula.¹²

NAMED DISCIPLES AND FOLLOWERS OF JESUS:

Disciples told to prepare the place where they will begin the Passover (i.e., the Last Supper):

- Mark 14:13: two unnamed disciples.
- Matt. 26:19: the disciples as a group.
- Luke 22:8: Peter and John.
- John 13:1ff. No mention of the place or of how it was found.

Judas Iscariot (Mark 14:10/Matt. 26:14/Luke 22:3/John 13:2, etc.):

In Luke, Satan enters into Judas; in John, Satan "had already put it into [Judas's] heart" to betray Jesus. In Mark and Matthew, no explanation is given for Judas's betrayal. When Jesus tells the disciples at the Last Supper that one of them will betray him:

- In Mark 14:17-21, the disciples are distressed, but no speech of Judas is reported.
- In Matthew 26:25, the disciples are distressed, but "Judas, who betrayed him, said, 'Surely not I, Rabbi?' He replied, 'You have said so.'"
- In Luke 22:21-23, the disciples ask one another "which one of them could it be who would do this," but no speech of Judas is reported.
- In John 13:21, the disciples are puzzled; the disciple "whom Jesus loved" was sitting next to Jesus, and Simon Peter "motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking," and when he asked Jesus, Jesus answered, "It is the one to whom I give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish." Jesus then dips the bread and gives it to Judas, and at that very moment, "Satan entered into him," and Jesus said to Judas, "Do quickly what you are going to do." Some of the disciples thought that Jesus was telling Judas to buy supplies for the Passover, or give money to the poor. Judas leaves immediately.
- Judas's suicide is reported only in Matthew; in Acts 1:18-20 it is said that with his money he bought a field, but "falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out," as typological fulfillment of passages in Ps. 69:25 and Ps. 109:8.
- "Judas" is a form of the name Judah; the meaning of Iscariot is not clear.

¹² For example, Eusebius (ca. 260-340), *Church History*, 2.7, in Christian Classics Ethereal Library URL: <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf201.i.html>

Peter's denial:

- Is announced after Jesus tells the disciples that they will all desert him (Mark 14:29/Matt. 26:34/Luke 22:34/John 13:38)— in John, Jesus does not predict that the disciples will desert him.

Disciples who accompany Jesus to the garden where he prays before being arrested:

- Mark 14:33: Peter, James and John. The garden is Gethsemane, on the Mount of Olives.
- Matt. 26:37: Peter and the two sons of Zebedee (i.e., James and John). The garden is Gethsemane (on the Mount of Olives).
- Luke 22:39: The disciples as a group. The garden is on the Mount of Olives.
- John 18:1: The disciples as a group—in John, Christ's prayers in the garden are not reported, but rather, as soon as they all enter the garden (which is "across the Kidron valley"—i.e., Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives), Judas appears with soldiers and temple police to arrest Jesus.

Women who watch the crucifixion from a distance:

- Mark 15:40, 47; 16:1: Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James the younger [or "the less"] and of Joses [another form of "Joseph"], together with Salome. In Mark 6:3 and Matt. 13:55, James the younger and Joses/Joseph, together with men named Judas and Simon, are said by people in the synagogue of Nazareth to be the brothers of Jesus, who is identified as the son of Mary. Whether "brothers" means kinsmen or biological siblings is unclear; thus it is unclear whether the Mary here with Mary Magdalene is Jesus's mother or another woman of the same name. Scholars have suggested that Salome, a.k.a. Mary Salome (Heb. *Miriam Shulamit*) was Zebedee's wife (next bullet point).
- Matt. 27:56, 61: Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of James and Joseph, and the unnamed "mother of the sons of Zebedee." Zebedee is the father of James and John in all four Gospels; Jesus summons them from their father's fishing nets in Mark 1:19-20/Matt. 4:21/Luke 5:10; this story is not in John, but nevertheless the sons of Zebedee are so called in John 21:2, when the resurrected Jesus appears to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias.
- Luke 23:49, 55: The women who watch from a distance are identified only as "the women who had followed him from Galilee."
- In John, none of Jesus's followers is said to be at the site of the crucifixion.

Joseph of Arimathea (Mark 15:43, 45-46/Matt. 27:57-60)/Luke 23:50-53/John 19:38-39):

- In Mark, he is "a respected member of the council who was also himself waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God" who "went boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus," and when the request was granted, he "bought a linen cloth, and taking down the body, wrapped it in the linen cloth and laid it in a tomb that had been hewn out of the rock. He then rolled a stone against the door of the tomb." He is observed by

“Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses.” Arimathea is a town 20 miles NW of Jerusalem.

- In Matthew, he is “a rich man from Arimathea... who was also a disciple of Jesus,” who requested the body from Pilate, from whom he received the body, “wrapped it in a clean linen cloth and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock.” Then he “rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away.” He is observed by “Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, [who were] sitting opposite the tomb.”
- In Luke, he is “a good and righteous man... who, though a member of the council, had not agreed to their plan and action. He came from the Jewish town of Arimathea, and he was waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God.” He requested the body of Pilate, took it down from the cross, “wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid it in a rock-hewn tomb where no one had ever been laid. He did this on “the day of Preparation,” when “the sabbath was beginning”—that is, just before dawn on Saturday. After this, “the women who had come with [Jesus] from Galilee followed, and they saw the tomb and how his body was laid. Then they returned, and prepared spices and ointments,” after which “on the sabbath they rested according to the commandment.”
- In John, Joseph is “a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews.” He requested the body of Pilate, and Pilate let him “take away the body of Jesus.” With him is Nicodemus, “who had at first come to Jesus by night. Nicodemus brings “a mixture of myrrh and aloes weighing about a hundred pounds. They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews.” They take him to a “new tomb in which no one had ever been laid,” which is in “a garden in the place where he was crucified.” They did this because it was the day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby. No other people are said to be present when they lay the body in the tomb.
- In the Middle Ages, a legend arose in which Joseph was the keeper of the chalice Christ used at the Last Supper, and this chalice was known alternately as the Holy Grail. According to this legend, Joseph travelled to Britain and established the first Christian church at Glastonbury, then became the first bishop in Britain. In the Protestant Reformation, supporters of Henry VIII used this legend as “proof” that the church was established in England before it was established in Rome, and that therefore the English church, not the Roman Catholic Church, was the true church. But that is a tale for another lecture.

Nicodemus (John 19:39):

- Nicodemus is mentioned only in John. He is introduced in John 3:1-21 as “a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews,” who “came to Jesus by night” and questioned him about who he is and who may see the kingdom of God. He re-appears in John 7:50 when the temple police go to the chief priests and Pharisees, who want Jesus arrested; but Nicodemus intervenes, saying, “Our law does not judge people without first giving them a hearing to find out what they are doing, does it?” The Pharisees then wonder whether he is from Galilee, which many Pharisees considered lax about Judaism and a

hotbed of rebellion against the established order of the religion in Jerusalem.¹³ Thus, over his three appearances in John, Nicodemus transforms from a doubter into a believer.

OTHER NAMED CHARACTERS:

Barabbas:

- The name *Barabbas* means “son of the father” (*bar-abbas*).¹⁴ Not all ancient manuscripts assign the richly ironic name “Jesus Barabbas” to him.
- Mark 15:7 identifies him as a prisoner “with the rebels who had committed murder during the insurrection,” but it is not known which of the many early 1st c. CE insurrections is meant.
- Nothing is known about the supposed custom of releasing a prisoner to the crowd, but there is a kind of logic to asking for the release of a lower-level Jewish rebel who could then resume his activities against Rome, while demanding the crucifixion of Jesus, who had challenged established beliefs and practices. Pilate did not see Jesus as a threat to Rome; but the temple officials saw Jesus as a threat to their authority.

Simon of Cyrene:

- Cyrene, in modern Libya, was the capital of the Roman province of Cyrenaica; it had a large Jewish population. Simon of Cyrene is otherwise unknown.
- Further see St. Simon of Cyrene Orthodox Mission; URL: <https://crossbearing.org/whoisstsimon.html>

UNNAMED CHARACTERS:

- “man carrying a water jar” (Mark 14:13/Luke 22:10), identified only as “a certain man” in Matt. 26:18: Jesus tells the disciples that this man will lead them to the place where they will go to prepare for the Passover.
- “angel from heaven” (Luke 22:43): Not in all ancient manuscripts; the angel appeared from heaven and “gave him [Jesus] strength” as he prayed.
- The crowd (Mark 14:43/Matt. 26:47/Luke 22:47/John 18:3) that comes to arrest Jesus.
- The young man who runs off naked (Mark 14:51-52), OR the slave of the high priest whose ear an unnamed person cuts off but which is restored by Jesus (Matt. 26:51/Luke 22:50), OR the high priest’s slave Malchus whose ear Simon Peter cuts off and is restored by Jesus (John 18:10-11).

¹³ Attridge et al., note to John 7:52; Azlan, *Zealot, passim*.

¹⁴ Attridge et al., note to Matt. 27:16.

- Servant-girl and bystanders with Peter when he denies Jesus three times (Mark 14:66/Matt. 26:69-75/Luke 22:56-61), OR the woman at the gate, the slaves and the police with Peter when he denies Jesus three times (John 18:16-18, 25-27).
- The crowd at Jesus' sentencing (Mark 15:8/Matt. 27:15-24/Luke 23:13/John 18:40; 19:6, 12, 15-16):
- Pilate's wife (Matt. 27:19): Otherwise unknown.
- Pilate's soldiers "and the whole cohort" (Mark 15:16/Matt. 27:27): They later divide Jesus' clothing among themselves (Mark 15:24/Matt. 27:35/Luke 23:34/John 19:23-25).
- Two "bandits" (Mark 15:27/Matt. 27:38), OR "criminals" (Luke 23:33), OR "others" (John 19:18) crucified on either side of Jesus.
- Passersby and bystanders who mock the crucified Jesus (Mark 15:29/Matt. 27:39/Luke 23:35): This group and their behavior is conspicuously absent in John.
- Person who offers Jesus sour wine (Mark 15:36/Matt. 27:48), OR soldiers who offer sour wine (Luke 23:37), OR "they" who offer sour wine (John 18:29).
- Roman centurion who declares that Jesus was "truly the son of God" (Mark 15:39/Matt. 27:54), OR that "certainly this man was innocent" (Luke 23:47).
- Soldier who pierces Jesus' side with a spear (John 19:34): In later legend deriving from the apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus, he is named Longinus, and along with the chalice used at the Last Supper the Spear of Longinus becomes part of the legend of the Holy Grail.
- "Many women" who had followed Jesus, some of who are said to be from Galilee (Mark 15:41/Matt. 27:55/Luke 23:49): In the Synoptics, they look on from a distance at the crucifixion. Only in Luke are "all his acquaintances," who are not specifically said to be disciples, mentioned as being there with the women. Neither the women nor the "acquaintances" are mentioned in John.
- Soldiers of the chief priests who secure Jesus' tomb (Matt. 27:66).

CHRIST'S LAST WORDS IN THE FOUR PASSION NARRATIVES

Mark 15:33-34, 37-38: "When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land [or, earth] until three in the afternoon. At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema

sabachthani?’ which means, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ [At this point he is given sour wine on a stick.] Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.”

Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani is Aramaic, from Ps. 22:1.

Matthew 27:45-46, 50-52: “From noon on, darkness came over the whole land [or, earth] until three in the afternoon. AND about three o’clock, Jesus cried with a loud voice, ‘Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?’ that is, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ [At this point he is given sour wine on a stick.] Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last [or, gave up his spirit]. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top[to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many.”

Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani is Hebrew, from Ps. 22:1.

Luke 23:44-46: “It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land [or, earth] until three in the afternoon, while the sun’s light failed [or, the sun was eclipsed]; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, ‘Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.’ Having said this, he breathed his last.”

John: “After this [i.e., after instructing the beloved disciple to take care of Mary], when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture [i.e., Ps. 69:21]), ‘I am thirsty.’ A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the wine, he said, ‘It is finished.’ Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.”

In Mark and Matthew, Christ cries out twice; in Luke, once. In Mark and Matthew, his first cry is Ps. 22:1, which Mark has him say in Aramaic and Matthew in Hebrew. Then he cries out again as he dies, but this is apparently a wordless cry, a sound only. In Luke, Christ cried out only once, at the moment of death, yielding his spirit to God.

Although the Synoptics may seem to disagree—Mark and Luke having Christ experience a moment of despair before death, and Luke having him die in complete faith—the quotation from Ps. 22:1 actually begins a meditation that concludes on the idea of commending one’s spirit to God. Thus, Mark and Matthew begin the meditation, and Luke concludes it. In a sense, the Passion in the Synoptics is a narrative expansion of Psalm 22.

Other elements of Psalm 22 in the Synoptics’ Passion narrative:

Mocking of Jesus:

(1) Mark 15:16-20 / Matt. 27:27-31: the Roman soldiers mock Jesus. / Luke 22:65: the crowd at the high priest’s house mocks Jesus.

(2) Mark 15:29, 31 “Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying... ‘ save yourself, and come down from the cross!’” “In the same way the chief priests, along with the scribes, were also mocking him among themselves and saying, ‘He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Messiah [or, the Christ], the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe.’ Those who were crucified with him also taunted him.” / Matt. 27:39 “Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, ‘... save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross!’ In the same way, the chief priests also, along with the scribes and the elders, were mocking him, saying... he trusts in God; let God deliver him now if he wants to.” / Luke 23:35-36, 39: “the leaders scoffed at him, saying, ‘He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah [or, the Christ] of God, his chosen one!’” “the soldiers also mocked him ... saying, ‘If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself’” “One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding [or, blaspheming] him and saying, ‘Are you not the Messiah [or, the Christ]? Save yourself and us!’”

- Ps. 22:7, “All who see me mock at me; / they make mouths at me, they shake their heads; ‘Commit your cause to the Lord; let him deliver-- / let him rescue the one in whom he delights!’”

Dividing Jesus’s clothing and casting lots for it:

Mark 15:24, “And they crucified him, and divided his clothes among them, casting lots to decide what each should take” / Matt. 27:35, “they divided his clothes among themselves by casting lots” / Luke 23:34, “They cast lots to divide his clothing”

[Some ancient MSS of the NT add, “in order that what had been spoken through the prophet might be fulfilled, ‘They divided my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots,’” which attests to the way ancient Christians understood this part of the Passion narrative.]

- Ps. 22:18, “they divide my clothing among themselves, / and for my clothing they cast lots.”

The Passion narrative’s typological connection to Ps. 22 explains how the Synoptics can differ and yet be the same:

In Mark and Matthew, Jesus says nothing between Pilate’s questioning (Mark 15:2-5; Matt. 27:11-14) and his last words on the cross (Mark 15:34; Matt. 27:46). This possibly gives the reader the impression that his ordeal has driven him into despair, but it certainly is confusing. How can the Son of God, who has prepared himself and his disciples for this moment for a long time, give in to despair?

In Luke, Jesus is forgiving, trusting, and confident in his last hours. He says of the crowd mocking him, “Father forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing” (23:24; actually not in all ancient MSS). He says to the “Good Thief,” “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me

in Paradise” (23:42). His last words are, “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit” (23:46). This is what we would hope for from the Son of God.

Luke differs from the other two Synoptics such that Mark and Matthew emphasize the beginning of Ps. 22, while Luke emphasizes the conclusion. The clue to their relationship with Ps. 22 is that all three allude to Ps. 22:18, which is the turning point of the emotional and spiritual development of the Psalm. John 19:23-25 makes the typological connection explicit by saying, “This was to fulfill what the scripture says, [quotes Ps. 22:18].”

Explanation: Ps. 22:1-18 are sheer anguish and complaint, but they are not despair. Verse 1a, “why have you forsaken me?” is re-expressed in verse 1b, “Why are you so far from helping me ?” This is not despair. It’s parallel to Job complaining, but never cursing God, never giving in to unfaith in God.

The Psalm expresses trust in God even in this section: “Yet you are holy... In you our ancestors trusted... and you delivered them” (22:3-4). “Yet it was you who took me from the womb; / you kept me safe on my mother’s breast” (22:9). Then the speaker appeals to God: “Do not be far from me” (22:11).

The complaint concludes in 22:18, where people divide his clothes and cast lots. In all three Synoptics of the Passion narrative, this moment comes directly after Jesus is crucified, which indicates that Mark, Matthew, and Luke all read Ps. 22:18, and indeed all of this Psalm, as a typological foreshadowing of the Crucifixion. Again, John 18:23-25 makes this typology explicit.

From 22:19 to the end of the Psalm (22:31), the rest of Psalm 22 calls on God for help and expresses faith in God that opens out to become a general praise of God on behalf of all people, concluding with a verse that suggests the coming of the new covenant of Christ: “Posterity will serve him; / future generations will be told about the Lord, / and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn, / saying that he has done it.”

Thus, Luke does not present a different picture of Christ’s death from Mark and Matthew: he presents the same picture from another point of view, which is exactly what the Synoptics do as a whole. Luke presents the perspective of the second half of Psalm 22, whereas they present the perspective of the first half. Why does Luke not use the last words of Christ from Mark and Matthew as well? Scholars think that Mark and Matthew addressed their Gospels to different Jewish audiences, whereas Luke addressed his Gospel to gentiles. Thus, Mark and Matthew could expect their readers to catch the allusions to Psalm 22 and to read the Passion narrative typologically in light of the entire Psalm, whereas Luke did not take the risk of letting his audience think that Jesus fell into despair at the end.

Christ’s last words in John:

Christ’s last words in John differ from the Synoptics, as should be expected, given that John’s Gospel differs from the Synoptics in other respects, as well. However, when Jesus says, “It is

finished,” he is saying, “It is completed,” or “it is consummated/fulfilled,” as the Latin of the Vulgate indicates: “Consummatum est,” which translates the OT Greek *tetelestai* (τετελεσται).

Thus John, no less than the Synoptics, takes pains to emphasize that the Passion is the typological fulfillment of OT prophecy, as he says in the following passages:

- 19:24 < Ps. 22:18.
- 19:28 < Ps. 69:21.
- 19:36-37 < Ps. 34:20 and Ex. 12:46 or Num. 9:12.

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