



The DAILY JESUS NEWS #311
Friday... Day of Agony and Atonement

Jesus' Three-Phase Roman Trial

Jesus is Led to the Roman Governor, Pilate
JN 18.28-32 (Parallel Texts: MT 27.1; MK 15.1A; LK 23.1)

=====

28^MThey bound Jesus, ^Lthen the whole assembly rose and led him off ^Jfrom Caiaphas to the palace of the Roman governor ^{MT}and handed him over to Pilate, the governor. By now it was early morning, and to avoid ceremonial uncleanness they did not enter the palace, because they wanted to be able to eat the Passover.

29 So Pilate came out to them and asked, "What charges are you bringing against this man?"

30 "If he were not a criminal," they replied, "we would not have handed him over to you."

31 Pilate said, "Then take him yourselves and judge him according to your own law."

"But we don't have the right to execute anyone," they objected.

32 This took place to fulfill what Jesus had said about the kind of death he was going to die.

=====

NOTE: We use superscript identification of the source gospel in "blended texts" as follows: Matthew = ^{MT}, Mark = ^M, Luke = ^L, John = ^J, Acts = ^A. This "superscript ID" is inserted at the beginning of the quoted text, identifying that Bible book until a different superscript appears. In addition, *red italics identify the words of Jesus*. Old Testament quotations are CAPITALIZED.

	CONTEXT DIGEST
Location	The Praetorium: Palace of the Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate
Timeline	Early April (Month 39)
Jesus' Life Context	Stage VIII: Passion Week
	E. Friday: Day of Agony and Atonement
	Jesus' Three-Phase Roman Trial
Title	Jesus is Led to Pilate, the Roman Governor

Today's reading begins the 3 Phases of the Roman trial of Jesus. The Sanhedrin brought Jesus to Pilate to begin the proceedings. The narrative drips with irony on the part of the Jewish leaders, while the words of Jesus are elevated in contrast.

The irony of the Sanhedrin's commitment to following the letter of the ceremonial law was made plain by John's narrative. Because Pilate was a gentile, he was ceremonially "unclean" under Jewish law. Therefore the leaders did not want to go into his palace--the praetorium--lest they become "unclean" and thereby rendered unable to participate in the Passover sacrifices in the Temple later that day. Their hypocrisy was shocking.

These men had no qualms about lying, perjury, false accusations, and their desire to commit murder by having Jesus crucified. They had no problems with any of the violations of judicial procedure that they had condoned in their vendetta against Jesus. Their hearts were evil, filled with envy and hatred. Yet they were legalistically careful not to "stain" themselves by contact with "unclean" ground, or persons.

Furthermore, they were perfectly happy to force Jesus into the praetorium for interrogation by Pilate, and make him "unclean," because he was a "criminal" and it did not matter. The behavior of the Jewish leaders was supremely hypocritical, and wreaked of ironic injustice.

Pilate could see the envy and hatred of Jesus that motivated these men. He gave an order for them to deal with the situation themselves--he wanted no part of it. However, the Jewish leaders insisted that he must get involved, because they wanted Jesus to be crucified--the most humiliating and excruciating way to die that they could conceive.

Crucifixion was a Roman specialty reserved for the worst criminals against the Empire, intended to make an example of those who did not submit themselves to Roman power and authority. This was the first of many instances in the Roman phase of Jesus' trial where Pilate showed himself to be a man-pleaser, rather than a man who stood by his convictions. He was a politician, not a leader.

Against the hypocrisy and irony of the Jewish leaders, and the weakness and man-pleasing of Pilate, John ended this scene by elevating the words of Jesus again to the level of Scripture. Jesus had predicted many times that he would be "**handed over to the Gentiles,**" to be crucified, meaning the Roman authorities.

The phrase that John used for Jesus' words being fulfilled is the same wording he used many times for the Old Testament Scriptures being fulfilled. In other words, John viewed the words of Jesus to be as much the "word of God" as the Scriptures, because Jesus was himself the Living, eternal "Word of God" robed in human flesh.

The Jewish leaders spurned the command of Pilate--who was backed by all the Imperial power of the Emperor in Rome, when he commanded them to deal with Jesus themselves. Little did they know that they were actually fulfilling the Word of God--Jesus Himself--when they sought to crucify him. It was actually Jesus who was in full control of what was happening to him. As he had said:

"I lay down my life so that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again." (JN 10.17B-18A)

APPLICATION:

One of Jesus' major problems with the Pharisees, and their hypocrisy, was that they "**strained at gnats and swallowed camels.**" They were oblivious to the huge, major ways they were disobeying God, while they were extremely careful to observe the minor details of the ceremonial law that were relatively unimportant. Their priorities regarding obedience were upside down. Today's reading is a classic example of this.

Hypocrisy is an expression of our sinful nature. We all engage in it in some ways. Probably the most common way we do it is by **"straining at gnats and swallowing camels."**

We deal strictly with some particular sins, while ignoring others. Every church or denomination has its own "worst sins" list--and they are all different. My own denomination, for example, has long emphasized the evils of drunkenness, gambling, and smoking cigarettes. The problem is that we have remained silent on the sins of over-eating that lead to obesity, and physical laziness in avoiding exercise. These too are sins against our bodies--the Temple of the Holy Spirit. And this is just the beginning. Our "sins list" is subjective, selective, culturally influenced, and far from complete.

None of us are capable of monitoring ourselves when it comes to sinfulness, and sinning. We are blind to our own gnats and camels. Only God's Word and the God the Holy Spirit can deal with all of our sins--both "big" and "small" varieties. Only God can fully deal with our incipient hypocrisy. We also need brutally honest accountability to each other.

The good news is that God loves to make us clean and whole, as he makes us more like himself. Jesus died to sanctify us fully, just as he prayed. Jesus and his Word are the cure for hypocrisy.

What are the "gnats" you pay attention to, and the "camels" you tend to swallow?

How often to you pray for God to show your own blind spots?

How will you increase the frequency of this essential, ongoing prayer request?