

THE CRUCIAL HOURS

*When Time And Eternity Converged
To Determine The Destiny Of Mankind*

by
Wm. A. Lauterbach

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FOREWORD

Not Normandy, not Waterloo, not Gettysburg, nor any other decisive clash of armed forces which changed the course of human events, can claim to be history's most crucial hour — not when we are aware of what took place almost 2,000 years ago in a small vassal state of the mighty Roman Empire and without force of combat. When Jesus of Nazareth paid His last visit to Jerusalem, time and eternity converged to determine the destiny of mankind.

The world shrugged off the activity of these eventful hours as the mere suppression of an eccentric rabbi. However, a much higher assessment had already been made on the holy mount by the transfigured Lord Jesus and His heavenly visitors, the glorified Moses and Elijah. Their sublime conversion centered on the path that Jesus had to follow and the work that He had to fulfill at Jerusalem.

Never in all history were the stakes so high or the results so far-reaching.

If heaven now resounds with the voices of praise proclaiming, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain!” can those on earth redeemed by His blood remain silent or lose interest in the events of Holy Week? Can a child of God ever be more properly or profitably engaged than in searching and examining the sacred record of the crucial hours when man's redemption was being secured, and in glorifying Christ for His supreme act of love?

The primary sources of the material presented in this volume are the sacred Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. The annals of secular history, where available, serve as a secondary source to help us understand the events and customs of that day. Wherever there is a reference to a tradition or a legend, the reader will find that it has been identified as such. Where the records are silent, the author has not ventured to speak, since speculation easily gives birth to distortion and may lead to false conclusions.

For the sequence of events and the division of the material, the author has adopted the arrangement of “The Passion History” in *The Lutheran Lectionary* (quoted with the permission of the publishers, *viz.* Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, Missouri). “The Passion History” quotations appear in **bold type** as the introduction to each division. The paragraphs that follow in *italics* give the Scripture passages from which the compilation was derived.

The goal of this book is to aid the reader in understanding and appreciating our Savior's redeeming love — that he may be led to a deeper knowledge and a bolder confession of His glorious name. The constant focal point is Christ and His sacrificial work. All other persons in the account are important only in relation to Him, and as their actions have bearing upon His redemptive acts.

Wm. A. Lauterbach

CHAPTER ONE

Jesus' Readiness To Suffer And Die



— A —

Jesus Determines The Time And Manner Of His Death

Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread drew nigh, which is called the Passover. And Jesus said unto His disciples, “Ye know that after two days is the feast of the Passover, and the Son of Man is betrayed to be crucified.” (TLL, p. 260)

He said unto His disciples, “Ye know that after two days is the Feast of the Passover, and the Son of Man is betrayed to be crucified.” (Matt. 26:1b,2)

After two days was the Feast of the Passover and of Unleavened Bread. (Mark 14:1a)

Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread drew nigh, which is called the Passover. (Luke 22:1)

Jesus Himself identified the day on which He declared the time and manner of His death as the twelfth of Nisan. That is clear from His remark to His disciples, “AFTER TWO DAYS IS THE FEAST OF THE PASSOVER.” The Passover falls on the fourteenth of Nisan.

Since the fourteenth of Nisan in that year apparently fell on Thursday, this day was Tuesday — the great Tuesday, so full of labor, conflicts, and teaching, of which such a comprehensive report has been preserved for us

THE GREAT TUESDAY (Matt. 21:23-26:5; Mark 11:20-14:2; Luke 20:1-22:2). This was one of the busiest days in the public life of Jesus. It began with the journey from Bethany to Jerusalem. Jesus stayed at Bethany on the nights preceding the feast. On the way to Jerusalem the withered fig tree became an object lesson by the Master on the tremendous power of faith, causing the disciples to be amazed. The Temple was the scene of Jesus’ last public teaching, of His warning to the Pharisees and Sadducees, and of His final call to national repentance. Here too the Greeks, representatives of the Gentile people, expressed their desire to “see Jesus,” even as the leaders of His own people were manifesting their increasing hostility toward Him.

His public teaching at the Temple concluded, Jesus proceeded to the Mount of Olives with His disciples. There He conversed with them on the destruction of Jerusalem and the Last Judgment, making fitting applications in parables. Near the close of this eventful day Jesus spoke the words which determined the time and manner of His death.

Announcement of His sacrificial suffering, including the manner of His death, had been made previously by Jesus:

1. At the first cleansing of the Temple (John 2:19-22)
2. To Nicodemus (John 3:14,15)
3. At Caesarea Philippi (Matt. 16:21-23)
4. At the close of the Galilean ministry (Matt. 17:22,23)
5. On the last journey to Jerusalem (Matt. 20:17-19)

Here He announces the exact time of His suffering. It was to coincide with the regularly established observance of the Feast of the Passover. This indicates more than a prediction and more than supernatural knowledge. This was an act of determining, or fixing, the time. Here He demonstrates His authority. Regardless of any plans of the Jewish leaders, it would be as He directs — Thursday night and Friday, and no other time.

The feast was really a twofold festival: A. The Passover (Heb., *pesach*), which lasted only one day, from sunset of the 13th until sunset of the 14th of Abib (or Nisan, as the month was later called) B. The Feast of Unleavened Bread, so called because of the removal of all leaven (yeast) from the homes. This feast lasted seven days, from sunset of the 14th until sunset of the 21st. From the beginning, the Feast of Unleavened Bread was connected with the Passover (Exod. 12:15), and in a later Jewish era they were merged into one festival lasting eight days. They were alternately designated as the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

The Passover commemorated the dreadful night of judgment and deliverance, the birth-night of the nation, while the Feast of Unleavened Bread was to remind the Children of Israel of the Exodus itself (Exod. 12). The festival was instituted at the time of the Exodus, and annual repetition was commanded. Other laws governing the festival are found in Leviticus 23:5-14; Numbers 9:10-14; 28:16-25. This Passover was to be unlike any other. It was set apart from all that had gone before as the one in which the true Lamb of God, symbolized by the countless paschal lambs of fifteen centuries, was to be offered as the sacrifice for all time.

The title “Son of Man” is found 84 times in the New Testament. It was coined by Jesus Himself and was used exclusively by Him, except in John 12:34 and in Acts 7:56. It is derived from Daniel 7:13,14. The term draws attention to the human nature of Jesus, yet at the same time the things that are attributed to Him imply that He was also far more than an ordinary man. It points to His divine nature and reminds us that “the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). Jesus preferred the term “Son of Man” over “Messiah” because of the unfortunate political implications His contemporaries had learned to read into the latter term.

The present tense, “is betrayed” (delivered up), is to be understood in a prophetic sense, or as an expression of certainty of what was about to occur. It indicates that the betrayal process had already begun. His enemies were even now plotting His betrayal. It might also be stated that in the eyes of the omniscient Lord the betrayal by Judas had already taken place in the heart of this avaricious “disciple.” On other occasions when Jesus’ enemies tried to take Him He escaped from them. Now, when they desired not to take Him, He willed to be taken, and His will had to prevail.

The manner of His death was not to be a matter of chance, but that too was determined beforehand. The Jewish mode of execution, in which the flesh was bruised and crushed, and the bones shattered by the impact of the stones hurled upon the victim, was not suited for the slaying of the Paschal Lamb. Care had to be taken not to break a single bone of His body (see pages 170,171). For that reason the Roman form of execution by crucifixion was much more suitable. It was furthermore necessary that He be “lifted up” before mankind as an object of faith (John 3:14,15), and that He bear “the curse” as our Substitute (Gal. 3:13).

Jesus not only knew that His hour had come, but He also knew the bitter shame that awaited Him in that hour when He would be executed like a criminal. Yet He did not flinch or waver in His purpose to fulfill the mission given Him by the Father.

— B —

The Rulers Conspire Against Jesus

Then assembled together the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders of the people, unto the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas, and consulted that they might take Jesus by subtilty, and kill Him. But they said, “Not on the feast day, lest there be an uproar among the people.” For they feared the people. (TLL, p. 260)

Then assembled together the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders of the people, unto the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas, and consulted that they might take Jesus by subtilty and kill Him. But they said, “Not on the feast day, lest there be an uproar among the people.” (Matt. 26:3-5)

And the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might take Him by craft and put Him to death. But they said, “Not on the feast day, lest there be an uproar of the people.” (Mark 14:1b,2)

And the chief priests and scribes sought how they might kill Him; for they feared the people. (Luke 22:2)

That same evening, at the very time when Jesus was predicting His crucifixion during the Passover festival, the council was plotting His death. The Evangelists name the constituent groups — the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders of the people — rather than saying “the council.” This supreme religious tribunal of the Jewish nation consisted of seventy-one members: priests, scribes, and laymen who were the elders of the people. It was known as the Sanhedrin. The Talmud traces its origin to Moses and his appointment of seventy elders, who, together with him, were to act as magistrates and judges of the nation (Num. 11:16).

This meeting of the council, or Sanhedrin, was an irregular one, as is shown both from the time of the meeting as well as the place. The Sanhedrin sat in regular ses-

AN IRREGULAR MEETING sions every day, except on the Sabbath and festival days, from the close of the morning sacrifice until the time of the evening sacrifice. Its regular meeting place was in the Hall of Polished Stones of the Temple. Because the hall would be closed for the lateness of the hour, this meeting was held in the palace of Caiaphas. No doubt the change of meeting place was welcomed by the leaders so that they could better avoid public attention and keep their plottings secret.

THE PRIESTLY OFFICE CORRUPTED The high priest stood at the pinnacle of the priestly office in Israel. The priestly office, according to its divinely prescribed duties and functions, was an office of reconciliation and mediation. The priests were to represent the people before God. In addition, the priests, and especially the high priest, were to lead God's people in God's ways. They were to be an example in holiness. As a symbol of holiness the high priest wore the crown of holiness upon his forehead. On the gold plate were inscribed the words "Holiness to the Lord" (Exod. 28:36). When the priests offered up daily sacrifices, these words also reminded the people of the sacrifice of the coming Savior, which would truly bring holiness for all.

How far the office had fallen from its high ideal! In the days of Christ this exalted office was occupied by Caiaphas, who was from the house of Annas, which supplied no fewer than eight high priests: father, five sons, one son-in-law (Caiaphas), and a grandson. This dynasty was notorious for corruption — for using political pressure to gain its selfish ends, thereby causing the perversion of justice and the lowering of moral standards.

CAIAPHAS Joseph Caiaphas was the high priest, not by the grace of God, but by the favor of the Romans, who changed the occupancy of the office at will in search of someone pliant enough to submit to their will. He was appointed to the office by Valerius Gratus, predecessor of Pontius Pilate, and occupied it for eleven years, from 25 A.D. to 36 A.D. Caiaphas was the son-in-law of Annas, a former high priest still active in Jewish politics, and like him belonged to the sect of the Sadducees, who were rationalistic in their philosophy and materialistic in their outlook. They were generally wealthy, belonged to the ruling class, and had close political connections with the Romans. They denied the resurrection of the dead and the existence of angels and other spirits (Acts 23:8). Because Jesus warned against their false doctrine (Matt. 16:6,12), exposed their wickedness (Matt. 16:3,4) and their ignorance (Matt. 22:29; Mark 12:24), and by His teachings undermined their influence on the people, the Sadducees hated Him with burning intensity.

Caiaphas is credited with first demanding the judicial murder of Jesus as an act of political necessity by recalling the well-known Jewish saying that it is better one man should die than that the nation perish (cf. John 11:48-50). At the same time, as St. John points out, in his capacity as high priest Caiaphas unwittingly spoke a word of prophecy when he proposed the death of Jesus for the benefit of the people.

The Sanhedrin had charge of all matters pertaining to religion and religious institutions. Formerly it inflicted not only corporal punishment, but also capital pun-

THE SANHEDRIN RESTRICTED

ishment. While it was the policy of the Roman government to interfere as little as necessary in the religious affairs of its subject people, they did take the power of inflicting capital punishment away from Israel forty years before the destruction of the Temple. Even though the Jewish leaders knew that their action was restricted, the determination to kill Jesus dominated the meeting. They “consulted that they might take Jesus by subtilty, and kill Him.” The concern of these men was where and how it should be done. Subtilty must be employed so that the murder might appear to be in the best public interest.

The timing called for the murder to take place after the feast, when the pilgrims would have departed and returned home. At the time of the feasts, especially the Passover, a great influx of people crowded the streets of Jerusalem. Among them were many religious enthusiasts whose presence had a

THEY FEARED THE PEOPLE

potential to make the crowds very volatile. The very enthusiastic welcome which had been given to Jesus by the people, especially on Palm Sunday, had not gone unnoticed. The leaders were afraid that if they should take Jesus during the feast and kill Him, the people would create an uproar. This was a human judgment and would probably have been correct if they had been dealing with a Jewish nationalist insurgent. He would have taken advantage of the acclaim of the multitude to raise a tumult among the people. But because Jesus acted in an entirely different way their calculation proved to be incorrect. He was killed on Good Friday, the day of preparation for the great Passover Sabbath, and no uproar arose in His favor.

The hostility against the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah was a type of this scheming against Jesus. He had written, “But I was like a lamb . . . that is brought to the slaughter; and I knew not that they had devised devices [planned schemes] against me, saying, ‘Let us destroy the tree with the fruit thereof, and let us cut him off from the land of the living that his name may be no more remembered’ ” (Jer. 11:19). The hope of the enemies in both cases was to nullify the work of Jeremiah and Jesus.

Tyranny as exercised here by the Sanhedrin is also described by the Psalmist: “They gather themselves together against the soul of the righteous and condemn the innocent blood” (Ps. 94:21).

— C —

Judas Iscariot Covenants To Betray Jesus

Then entered Satan into Judas, surnamed Iscariot, being of the number of the Twelve. And he went his way, and communed with the chief priests and captains, how he might betray Him unto them. And when they heard it, they were glad, and promised to give him money. And he said unto them, “What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you?” And they covenanted for thirty

pieces of silver. And he promised and sought opportunity to betray Him unto them in the absence of the multitude. (TLL, pp. 260-261)

Then one of the Twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests and said unto them, "What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you?" And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver. And from that time he sought opportunity to betray Him. (Matt. 26:14-16)

And Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, went unto the chief priests to betray Him unto them. And when they heard it, they were glad and promised to give him money. And he sought how he might conveniently betray Him. (Mark 14:10,11)

Then entered Satan into Judas surnamed Iscariot, being of the number of the Twelve. And he went his way and communed with the chief priests and captains how he might betray Him unto them. And they were glad and covenanted to give him money. And he promised, and sought opportunity to betray Him unto them in the absence of the multitude. (Luke 22:3-6)

The "then" indicates the time when Judas bargained with the Jewish leaders for the betrayal of his Master. However, there is a difference of opinion as to which time that was. It appears to be quite generally accepted by expositors that it points to Tuesday evening, the time when Jesus was setting Thursday as the day for His suffering to begin. Others, such as Lange and Lenski, connect it with the anointing of Jesus at Bethany and the rebuke of Judas by Jesus. They therefore see the possibility that the deal between Judas and the high priests might have been made as early as Saturday evening.

The conduct of Judas brings us face to face with a deep mystery. Was it only covetousness, grown so mighty, that prodded him on? Was it resentment against Jesus because Jesus had not fulfilled Judas' ambitious hopes for material power and advantages? Was he greatly disappointed because Jesus refrained from taking part in a public uprising and spoke of a cross instead of a crown? Of all the explanations for his conduct (and there are many offered) none satisfies as well as the statement of Scripture, "then entered Satan into Judas." Entry was made through the open door of his heart, out of which Jesus had been thrust. To gain this entry was a masterpiece of Satan. How does Luke know that Satan entered into Judas? The subsequent acts of Judas testify to it; but chiefly this knowledge was imparted by the Holy Spirit, under whose guidance Luke was writing.

This was not a case of demonic possession, where Satan entered by compulsion to rule in the members of the body; but rather, Judas willingly yielded control of the mind, heart, and will to the Prince of Darkness and became his obedient tool.

Two of the disciples were named Judas. To distinguish them one is called the brother (NASB, NIV; BECK: "son") of James (Luke 6:16), while the other is identified as Iscariot. This name he derived from his father, Simon Iscariot (John 6:71). Its apparent origin is *Ish Kerioth* (man of Kerioth), meaning that his home town was Kerioth in Judea (Joshua 15:25). Accordingly, Judas Iscariot was the only one of the Twelve who came from Judea. The other eleven were from Galilee. Attempts to connect his defection with his Judean origin are too farfetched to be given any weight.

Judas Iscariot was infamous as the betrayer. When the Evangelists write of him they always add a modifier, "Which also betrayed Him" (John 12:4).

"The Twelve" were the disciples whom Jesus had chosen from among His followers and later elevated to the apostleship. Judas was chosen at the same time as Peter and John. Outwardly he was connected with the cause OF THE TWELVE of Christ, but inwardly he was not one with Him. An entire year before His final suffering and death, and following His discourse on the Bread of Life, Jesus had sorrowfully told His disciples: "Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?" (John 6:70.) It is not for us to question why Jesus had chosen Judas, knowing from the beginning "who they were that believed not and who should betray Him" (John 6:64). When our faith turns to sight we shall also understand this mystery. We need not be surprised to find that question any more difficult than another: why has He chosen you and me?

The words "of the Twelve" ring in our ears with unmistakably plain and clear warning that the mere outward association or connection with the kingdom of God is NO BETTER OPPORTUNITY better opportunity than Judas Iscariot. He was a member of the select group of Jesus' disciples, dwelling together with the Son of God. As such he had the benefit of hearing instruction directly from Jesus' lips. He beheld Jesus' divine works, and he was elevated to the apostleship, destined for one of the apostolic thrones in heaven. Yet he spurned his Lord and Savior and became a willing tool of Satan. What a solemn warning to us that, unless we are always on our guard and heed the voice of the Good Shepherd, we too could be lost in spite of our outward affiliation!

The disciples were not under guard, so the betrayer was free to go as he chose. Luke tells us, "And he went his way and communed with the chief priests and captains." The captains were officers of the Levitical JUDAS WENT TO THE Temple police. To obtain an audience with the chief CAMP OF THE ENEMY priests Judas was probably obliged to go first to these commanders. They were apparently also present when the deal was made. Of his own volition Judas offered his despicable services to them. The idea was his, and he took the first steps in that infamous deal. It was not a case of yielding to a tempting offer, or a persuasive argument about his patriotic duty. Judas conceived the plan and sought out the enemies of Jesus.

Betrayal was the wicked proposal which this false disciple had to offer. He would use his position of privilege and trust to perpetrate treachery. He would betray HIM — no ordinary man, his Lord and Master, his best and truest Friend, and, above all, the Son of God.

What was there to betray? Who He was, or where He kept Himself? That was not necessary. His whereabouts were no secret. He had not gone underground. He could challenge the Sanhedrin: "I sat daily with you teaching in the Temple" (Matt. 26:55). They were seeking an opportunity to apprehend Him "in the absence of the multitude." Judas knew his Master's habits and places of retreat. He agreed to "deliver Him" under the circumstances favorable to the Jewish leaders.