

Features in the Four Approaches

Explanation

Central to any interpretation of the New Testament is an understanding of the trial and resurrection of Jesus. Everything in the Gospels builds to the concluding hours of his life, and virtually everything in Christianity turns on how one views these critical events.

The death of Jesus, however, is not easy to understand. From the beginning, it was difficult for many of his followers to understand and accept. Most messianic expectations assumed that the Anointed One would come in a glorious fashion, even though Isaiah 53 had prophesied otherwise; and the fact that Jesus was hung on a tree was a scandal to many, who used this shameful execution in denigrating him.

In light of the importance and complexity of these historic moments, it is not surprising that the four Gospels take different approaches to these far-reaching events. Consistent with the varying approaches taken in the Gospels generally (see charts 7-2 and 7-3), each of the four Gospels emphasizes different aspects of the trial and death of Jesus. Luke consistently features humanitarian and public elements; Matthew draws upon Israelite factors; Mark gives a straightforward, powerful account; and John consistently directs attention toward eternal and divine elements.

References

- John W. Welch, "Latter-day Saint Reflections on the Trial and Death of Jesus," *Clark Memorandum* (fall 2000): 2–13.
"Passion Week," *WRC*, 41–46.

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MATTHEW: Israelite Features	MARK: Power Features	LUKE: Populist Features	JOHN: Eternal Features
Twelve legions of angels (compare the twelve tribes of Israel)	When the ear is cut off and healed, no words, just actions	Concern about lowly servant, healing his ear	Foreknowledge of the actions of Judas
Jesus is taken directly to high priest, adjudicator of Jewish law	They arrest Jesus under heavy guard	The arresters blaspheme Jesus (the popular world rejects Jesus)	Concern over impurity in Praetorium
False witnesses testify (compare witnesses against Naboth)	False witnesses are powerless	No actual accusation until before Pilate (making it a public affair)	Concern over who has power to deliver
Jesus shows respect for the Jewish Temple with power over it	Jesus said, "I will destroy this temple"	Allegations involve ordinary public offenses: he stirs up the people	God as king? "We have no king but Caesar"
Focus on blasphemy, violation of Jewish law	Jesus responds powerfully, "I am"	Herod's soldiers play games	"My kingdom is not of this world"
Israelites willing to take responsibility: "His blood be upon us"	Those with power move against Jesus, all condemning Jesus	Women are mentioned; Jesus prophesies to them	"For this cause came I into the world"
When the earth shook, dead Israelites arose	Guards beat Jesus	Jesus asks the Father to forgive those who crucified him	Casting of lots, thirsting, side pierced; all fulfilled prophecy
	Crowd is very demanding, threatening riot	The robber on the cross invited into paradise	Jesus said, "It is finished"
	Roman soldiers mock Jesus' power	The crowd beats their breasts	
	Joseph of Arimathea, a powerful member of the Sanhedrin, mentioned		