

THE CRUEL CONSPIRACY (Mk. 14:1,2)

Mk. 14:1 After two days was the feast of the passover, and of unleavened bread: and the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might take him by craft, and put him to death. ² But they said, Not on the feast day, lest there be an uproar of the people.

We left our previous study at the end of Mk. 11 where the authority of Jesus (Mk. 11:27-33) succeeded in renouncing the chief priests, the scribes and the elders in the courtyard of the temple. ... In chapter twelve He continued to address their hypocrisy (12:1-11), and they could barely control their hatred of Him, ¹² And they sought to lay hold on him, but feared the people: for they knew that he had spoken the parable against them: and they left him, and went their way.

Then, one after another, He met with a continuous barrage of aggression, ... starting with the religious Pharisees and the political Herodians who were normally sworn enemies (12:13-17), followed by the Sadducees (12:18-27), and the scribe (12:28-34) ... but He repelled them all, ³⁴ And no man after that durst ask him any question. ... He proceeded to teach about King David and the Messiah (v.35-37), the deceptiveness of the religious elite (v.38-40), and the widow's mite (v. 41-44).

Chapter thirteen begins with Him leaving the temple, and one of His disciples drawing attention to the grand building (v.1). The remainder of the chapter relates to future events ... first of all, the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD ... and continuing to the end of the age. This is a chapter relating to prophecy, *eschatology*, the 'study of last things'.

We shall be coming back to these two chapters after Easter ... but for now we shall concentrate on the final days leading to the Last Supper, His arrest, crucifixion and resurrection.

Mk. 14:1 After two days was the feast of the passover, and of unleavened bread: and the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might take him by craft [*trick Him, 'catch Him out'*], and put him to death. ² But they said, Not on the feast day, lest there be an uproar of the people. ... In the centre of the stage is the Lord Jesus. There were other players, but the story is *His Story* ... And it is *exactly* unfolding as planned before the beginning of time.

There was a kind of a confusing haze surrounding Jesus ... The Jewish leaders were apprehensive because they feared the people would react against them if they had pursued an immediate attack on Jesus. They were wrong though because as events were to illustrate, they had overestimated the people's

allegiance to Jesus for as the story transpired, the crowds showed a somewhat fickle loyalty to Him ... Yes, they had previously hailed Him when He had entered Jerusalem, and they had flocked to listen to Him in the temple court ... but as quickly as their enthusiasm for Jesus had arisen, it would also as quickly wane and evaporate. ... Their feelings were 'riding on the crest of the wave' of the religious emotions associated with the Passover season.

... It was hard for the disciples to assimilate and grasp the unfolding plan of God too ... In fact, it wasn't until afterwards they realised its full meaning. Peter, for example, understood it later and that is how he could present it on the Day of Pentecost when he stood in front of the crowds and told them, [Acts 2:23](#) Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken. ... Previously, it had alluded him, but *afterwards* He understood how it was in the will and plan of God *they* crucified Jesus!

... And these chief priests and scribes, - without implementing any objective examination of Jesus, - had already decided they didn't like Him, and that is what led to this most heinous of crimes ... They simply hated the Saviour. ... But, even though they did not realise it, their actions and attitude were working in accordance with God's plan! Regardless of what they thought of Him, Jesus was the Lamb of God slain before the foundation of the world ... and His death had been foretold by the prophet Isaiah, [Is. 53:10](#) it pleased *the LORD* to bruise him; *he* hath put him to grief ... and the pleasure of *the LORD* shall prosper in his hand ... God's will for the salvation of lost hell-deserving sinners was realised when He gave His only-begotten Son to die on the cross.

Mark gives us the date at the commencement of chapter fourteen ... so we are expected to pay attention to it, ¹ [After two days \[i.e. in two days' time\] was the feast of the passover, and of unleavened bread \[Matzah\]](#) ... So, Mk. 14:1 takes place two days before the Passover ... which means *this* is the Wednesday ... In two days' time the Passover will take place on the Friday which fell on the fourteenth day of the month Nisan, which is the first month of the religious year, in 30 AD.

In accordance with tradition, the Passover lambs were slain at the ninth hour, - three o'clock in the afternoon ... and that was preceded by a long blast of the *shofar* which signalled the beginning of the *Hallel* (a Jewish prayer, recitation from Pss. 113-118) ... This was the most sacred time for the Jews and dare not be interfered with. It heralded the start of Passover, and was met with such a

noise of excitement and celebration as the people remembered their forefathers commencing the journey out of Egypt. ... Jews from all over the then-known world had arrived in Jerusalem to commemorate this event ... so there must not be any interruptions ... and no unforeseen circumstances or complications. ... Confronting Jesus was *absolutely* out of the question!!

Indeed, there was so much going on in Jerusalem ... when the slaughtering of the lambs for sacrifice was beginning *inside* the temple ... *outside* the city walls, - also at the ninth hour ... the Saviour, - the Lamb of God, - was dying on the cross, **Mk. 15:34** *And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?* ... He died at the same moment the lambs were being offered to and slaughtered by the priests in the temple ... the ninth hour, three o'clock in the afternoon. ... And that was *why* the Jewish leaders did not want Jesus to be killed on that day and at that time, **Mk. 14:2** *But they said, Not on the feast day, lest there be an uproar of the people.* ... There was too much going on. The sacrifices were beginning, and this *Man* had to have no part in the Passover! ... However, His Father, - the God of Israel, - had planned it otherwise.

While the lambs were dying on the altar in the temple ... out on the cross, the Lamb of God was dying on the altar of Calvary. God's perfect Sacrifice, ... the precious blood of the Saviour was being shed to atone for the sins of His people. ... His sacrifice was being offered to end all sacrifices ... As Paul explained to the Corinthians, **I Cor. 5:7** *For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us.* ... And Peter, **I Peter 1:18** *ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold ... ¹⁹ But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.*

The chief priests and the scribes were not in control. All the way through, the plan of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit was working despite the plans of wicked men. ... The unseen hand of God was directing it all! ... The chief priests, the scribes, the Pharisees, the Romans, Herod ... none of them was conducting the proceedings at Calvary, *but God was!* ... He had prepared its every detail, and its every detail came to pass.

How important it is to realise our Heavenly Father is in control. There is nothing happening, - now or ever, - which is outside of His will. Paul tell us He even chooses the governments, - **Rom. 13:1** *there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.* ... Pontius Pilate had been put in power by

the will of God ... Herod had been put in power by God ... and each of those disreputable religious leaders had also been put in power by God. ... And here is another 'shock' for some ... God ordained who would be the First Minister of Scotland, and the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom ... and *even* the President of the United States of America! ... If we want to blame anyone for who is in power, *blame God*, if you dare!

The fact is though, God has a purpose behind everything He does ... and that purpose is always to His glory, and consistent with His will. No matter how we might not always understand it ... and it might be bringing to us pain and heartache, - but here is where we can find solace and hope ... He is not a God Who allows anything to work contrary to His purpose, for ultimately His Word assures us, **Rom. 8:28** all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. ... It is sometimes difficult to accept, but His Word says it, and we ought therefore to accept it.

Consider Jesus on this Wednesday ... looking ahead ... knowing the intentions of those despicable, cold-blooded and heartless men. ... Consider how difficult the Father's will was for His Son ... These men congregated in the house of the high priest Caiaphas (Mt. 26:3), and they manipulated their office to work out *how they might take him by craft, and put him to death* (Mk. 14:1). ... John tells us how their meeting went, **Jn. 11:47** Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a council ... They gave it a fancy name, - a council, συνέδριον, - but no matter what they called it, it was a religious rabble conniving to murder Jesus for they were discussing, *What do we? for this man, - they could not even bear to say His name, Jesus of Nazareth, - doeth many miracles.* **48** *If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him: and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation.* ...

... That is something else ... They weren't concerned about the religious ... they were concerned about the political! You could have had some sympathy for them if they had been interested in guarding and protecting their Jewish faith and heritage, but they weren't ... *that* was not their purpose for rejecting Jesus. Instead, they were worried about losing any political influence they had with the Roman invaders, who had desecrated their land with idolatry! Maintaining the Jewish religion was *not* uppermost in their thoughts! ... Imagine having religious leaders like that!! ... **Jn. 11:53** Then from that day forth they took counsel together for to put him to death ... or as Mark records it, **Mk. 14:1**

... how they might take him by craft, and put him to death. ... And what a time for all this to come up! ... *Passover* time! The Feast of Unleavened Bread! ...

And if they did not manage to do anything to Jesus *before* the Passover, they could not then do anything during the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread. This was the Wednesday, the next day was the day before the Passover, and then for seven days after that they could not touch Jesus either ... They were in a real conundrum!!

The Feast of Unleavened Bread was instituted away back immediately prior to the Jews leaving Egypt, **Ex. 12:15** Seven days shall ye eat unleavened bread; even the first day ye shall put away leaven out of your houses: for whosoever eateth leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that soul shall be cut off from Israel. **16** And in the first day there shall be an holy convocation, and in the seventh day there shall be an holy convocation to you; no manner of work shall be done in them, save that which every man must eat, that only may be done of you. **17** And ye shall observe the feast of unleavened bread; for in this selfsame day have I brought your armies out of the land of Egypt: therefore shall ye observe this day in your generations by an ordinance for ever. **18** In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at even, ye shall eat unleavened bread, until the one and twentieth day of the month at even. **19** Seven days shall there be no leaven found in your houses: for whosoever eateth that which is leavened, even that soul shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he be a stranger, or born in the land. **20** Ye shall eat nothing leavened; in all your habitations shall ye eat unleavened bread.

... So, the 10th day of Nisan was the Monday Jesus rode into Jerusalem on the donkey ... four days later on the 14th was Passover (Friday), and the next day (Saturday) began the week celebrating the Feast of Unleavened Bread. ... The order was set out in Ex. 12:12, God said, I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD. **13** And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are: and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt. **14** And this day shall be unto you for a memorial; and ye shall keep it a feast to the LORD throughout your generations; ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance for ever. ... The Passover preceded the Feast of Unleavened Bread. ... And this was a time of deep religious significance, and the leaders did not want any distraction, not even if it meant getting rid of Jesus! ... This was the one time they did not want to kill Him! ... Any other time, but not this time of the year!

Sometimes people think evil is out of control ... but evil is *never* out of *God's* control for as Charles Wesley wrote,

Jesus! the Name high over all,
 In hell or earth or sky;
 Angels and men before it fall,
 And devils fear and fly.

Evil is not out of control because God is in Sovereign control! Jesus knew what these religious rascals were 'up to', and He knew there was *nothing* they could do to contradict the will of His Father.

One of the most difficult issues for a Christian to deal with is why God allows His people to go through hard times. I believe with all my heart He is in control of all things, - there is nothing happens outside of His will, and He has a purpose in everything He permits ... But it becomes tremendously personal when you yourself are 'passing through the waters' and everything is 'falling in' around you. ... Why does God not lift me out of my predicament? Why is He allowing me to suffer? ... And then I look at Jesus in these hours before they come to arrest Him. He knows what is happening. He knows all about their wicked intent, He knows what they are coming to do ... and He could have changed the plan and stopped them.

He didn't though, for if He had only thought of Himself and stopped them, Calvary would not have taken place ... My sins, - and your sins, - would not have been atoned for, - we would have had to suffer their punishment eternally in Hell. He would not have succeeded in doing what He was sent into this world to do ... if His Father's plan would have been aborted.

We can ask why God allows terrible things to happen to His people ... but before we accuse Him, consider how He sent His Son as a little Baby into the humility of the manger in Bethlehem with the full knowledge that one day He would be nailed to a cross and die for us. ... He did not deserve that ... Death is the consequence of sin, but He never sinned. *We* did though, and that is why God judged our first parents in the Garden of Eden, **Gen. 3:19** *In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.*

Our sufferings are a consequence of *our* sin ... but Jesus had no sin, and yet He suffered more than any man (Is. 52:14). He did nothing to merit our

punishment being laid upon Him, except that He loved us ... and that is why He gave His life as our ransom. ... They did not take His life from Him, - the chief priests and the scribes 'did not have it in them' to take the Saviour's life for He in anticipation had already said, **Jn. 10:17** *I lay down my life, that I might take it again. 18 No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself.*

That is how confident He was in His Father's plan ... and surely, - no matter what this life brings upon us, - we cannot question what He allows to come our way because the reliance Jesus had in His Father is the same assurance every child of God possesses ...

'Twill be the way He chooses,
The Father's plan for me.

It was the vilest act perpetrated by wicked men, and yet, at the same time, - in the will of God, - it was the most wonderful and loving deed ever accomplished ... **I Tim. 1:15** *that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners* for where sin abounded, grace did much more abound (Rom. 5:20).

Was it for me He bowed His head
Upon the cross and freely shed
His precious blood, that crimson tide?
Was it for me the Saviour died?

It was for me, yes, all for me,
O love of God, so great, so free,
O wondrous love, I'll shout and sing,
He died for me, my Lord and King!

Just two days before the Feast of the Passover ... *just two days* ... the chief priests and the scribes desired to kill Jesus so as not to interfere with their religious festivities and celebrations ... *But God* was in control and *He* was watching over His only-begotten and beloved Son ... and the Father's plan for our salvation continued as He had gloriously decreed in eternity.