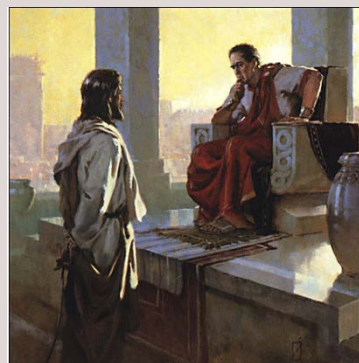


## ST. LUKE'S SIMILARITIES OF THE TRIALS BEFORE DEATH OF JESUS AND OF ST. PAUL

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There exist many similarities between the trial of Christ and that of St. Paul especially from the perspective of St. Luke. Out of all the Gospel writers, he portrays the apostles in a similar light to Christ in order to communicate to his readers the close connection between the apostles and Christ. For example, St. Luke uses some of the same literary expressions when speaking of the apostles, for the reader to recall how he spoke of Christ in the Gospel of Luke. Each of the Apostles in their own way bears witness to the life of Christ, proclaims the Good News of the Gospel and follows the footsteps of Jesus, thereby continuing the redemptive mission of Christ; each of the Gospels writers uniquely reflect these similarities. St. Luke wrote a two volume work and is therefore able to draw the correlations between Christ and his followers in the second volume. In the second volume of St. Luke's Gospel, the Acts of the Apostles, he highlights the likeness of the trial before death of St. Paul to the trial of Christ.



To begin, even prior to the trials the similarities of Jesus and St. Paul are many. First, Jesus in Luke's Gospel is journeying towards Jerusalem and St. Paul after his third missionary journey also journeys to Jerusalem (Acts 19:21; 21:8-17). In chapter 9 Luke proclaims, "*He set his face to go to Jerusalem,*" (Lk 9:51); two times earlier in this same chapter Jesus foretells his death, revealing his knowledge of what awaits him in Jerusalem (cf 9:22; 9:44). This is a long journey through the Gospel of Luke, but each step of the way Christ knows what and where his goal is in Jerusalem. While the apostles try to persuade Jesus from allowing his life to be given up, he rebukes them and reminds them that they are thinking as men think and not as God thinks. A similar drama is played out in the ministry of St. Paul: after ministering to the Christians in Ephesus, he knows he must move on and go to Jerusalem. They try to persuade St. Paul from going to Jerusalem after the prophet Agabus prophesied that "*he would be bound and delivered into the hands of the Gentiles*" (Acts 21:10-11) if he goes to Jerusalem. His response recalls that of Christ: resolute to act in a Godly manner and not follow the worldly ways. "*For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus*" (Acts 21:13). The Ephesians tried to persuade him not to go, but once they realize that Paul would not be persuaded they ceased begging him saying, "*the will of the Lord be done*" (Acts 21:14). Just as Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem, "*Paul is resolved in the Spirit...to go to Jerusalem*" (cf; Acts 19:21). Paul's journey will present trials as did Jesus' journey, but the Risen Lord and Holy Spirit will guide him along the path until he arrives at his destination. When Jesus arrives in Jerusalem he is welcomed by large crowds and he makes his way to the temple (Lk 19:28:48). Similarly, St. Paul is welcomed by the believers in Jerusalem and he correspondingly goes to the temple to fulfill a vow (Acts 21:17-26). For Jesus and St. Paul their arrest would come soon after this arrival to the Holy City.

Next, previous to the arrest of Jesus the scribes and chief priest had been seeking a way to put Jesus to death, but they feared the people (Lk 22:2). The desire of the Jewish leaders is to do away with Jesus without causing more division within their religious sects, as well as avoid public responsibility for his death. The high priest of St. Paul's time had a similar aim to kill him, but they were very secretive about their plans so they would not be suspected before it was completed. Sometime after the arrest of St. Paul, the Jews made a plot and bound themselves by an oath neither to eat nor to drink until they had killed Paul (cf; Acts 23:12ff). They were found out by the nephew of St. Paul, his sister's son who warned the authorities in order to spare his uncle's life; interestingly, it is the only mention of St. Paul's family in Scripture (Acts 23:12).<sup>1</sup>

In addition, both Jesus and St. Paul are arrested by Jewish mobs but then later turned over to Roman authorities. Jesus is praying with his disciples in the garden of Gethsemane when Jewish leaders come to take him into the city. They come in the night secretly, so as to not draw attention to themselves, even though they had access to him almost every day in the temple. Jesus' trial before the high priest stirs the crowds present for the Jewish feast of Passover into a riot, which eventually calls forth the Roman soldiers to bring order, by decree of the Roman governor Pilate. Similarly, Paul's arrest comes about when he is praying in the temple fulfilling a vow with four others; on his seventh day in the temple, he is seized and brought out, where a riot awaits him. While Paul is being dragged out of the temple, the people, led by the Jewish chief priests, try to kill him. It is the Roman soldiers, by decree of the Tribune, who stopped the Jews from beating Paul to death. While Paul is being carried away, a mob followed him crying "*Away with him*" (Acts 21:36), reminiscent of the crowds rejection of Jesus before Pilate<sup>2</sup> (Lk 23:18). When the soldiers come to break up the riot, they try to understand who Paul is and what he has done (Acts 21:34). The responses of the people vary, just as the accusations differed when the chief priests brought Jesus to Pilate. A difference between Jesus and Paul is that Jesus remains silent before the people to fulfill the words of Isaiah's suffering

servant: a lamb led to the slaughter (although Jesus does speak to Pilate). However, Paul does not remain silent, and instead asks to speak in order to share the message of Christ with those that are trying arrest him.

The trials of Jesus and St. Paul also follow a similar. Both men begin their trials in front of a Jewish court, both of which end with the Jewish fighting in anger. Next, they both go to a Roman governor - Pilate in the case of Jesus, and Felix in the case of Paul. Neither find any guilt in their prisoner. When Paul arrived it is stated that he was "*found accused about questions of their law, but charged with nothing deserving death or imprisonment*" (Acts 23:29). This is statement recalls the verdict given to Jesus in Luke 23:15, "*Behold I did not find this man guilty of any of your charges against him.*" Next, both men are sent by the Roman governor to Kings with a greater juridical jurisdiction. Moreover, King Herod who judges Christ and King Agrippa who judges St. Paul are family in the same line of kings. Both kings send their prisoners to the Roman governor, finding no crime within them. "*Then the king rose, and the governor ...; and when they had withdrawn they said to one another, 'This man is doing nothing to deserve imprisonment'*" (Acts 26:31) Both men are sentenced to be scourged at some point in their trials (although Paul's sentence is never carried out).

Furthermore, for the most part their trials even chronologically line up; some details don't match perfectly in the timeline but still happened to both figures. For example, Jesus is questioned by some Sadducees who deny the concept of the resurrection, and He preaches on its validity (Lk 20:29-38). St. Paul in his trial, in mixed company of Sadducees and Pharisees, argues against the Sadducees' view of the resurrection (Acts 23:6-9); this brings about an uproar between the two religious sects. While on trial both are held in custody although for varied amounts of time. Jesus was held in custody for a short time, in order that he might not interrupt the Jewish festivals. St. Paul was sent away as a prisoner by Felix and was held in custody for two years in Caesarea. Then after the death of Felix, Paul defends himself before the new appointed governor Festus and appeals to Caesar (who is believed to be the infamous Caesar Nero) (Acts 25:1-12). Paul is eventually taken to Rome and held there for another two years.<sup>3</sup> St. Paul is presented to King Agrippa and Queen Bernice, who desired to hear Paul's defense for himself (Acts 25:13-26:32). This desire to hear St. Paul recalls King Herod Antipas' desire to hear Jesus in Luke 23:8.<sup>4</sup> St. Paul was hated by the Jews most specifically for his preaching and ministry to the Gentiles, the unclean people. Likewise Christ was persecuted for coming to save all peoples, for eating with and healing tax collectors and sinners, those considered unclean by the Jews. Therefore both Jesus and St. Paul were carrying out the same mission and were disliked and stopped for similar reasons. As a prisoner Paul is sent on a sea voyage to Rome; when the winds of the sea turn for the worse, Paul is visited and assured of the ship's safety by an angelic presence, (Acts 27:23). St. Luke is the only Gospel writer to mention the angelic assistance he received in the agony in the garden, "*And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him*" (Lk 22:43). While on the ship, Paul encourages the crew to eat and take courage; he gives thanks and breaks the bread with them, which has a Eucharistic sense although it was also the normal Jewish ritual at meals. In these details, St. Luke certainly draws to mind the Last Supper Jesus shared with his Apostles on the eve of his trial.

To conclude, while all disciples of Christ should follow the footsteps of Christ, the manner in which St. Luke compares the trials of St. Paul and Jesus is profound. These significant comparisons encourage the reader to recall what Christ endured for us and see how the Apostle St. Paul was modeling his life after Christ. The words and writings of St. Luke inspire the disciples of Christ today to continue to follow in his footsteps, by seeking to model our lives after him, especially in our trials, where we learn how to abandon ourselves to the will of God and submit to his ways instead of ours.

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<sup>1</sup> Hahn, Scott, and Mitch, Curtis, Ignatius Catholic Study Bible, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 2001, p. 246

<sup>2</sup> Hahn, Scott, and Mitch, Curtis, Ignatius Catholic Study Bible, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 2001, p. 244

<sup>3</sup> Material provided by Rev. Felix Just, S.J., at [http://catholic-resources.org/Bible/Pauline\\_Chronology.htm](http://catholic-resources.org/Bible/Pauline_Chronology.htm)

<sup>4</sup> Hahn, Scott, and Mitch, Curtis, Ignatius Catholic Study Bible, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 2001, p. 151

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