

# Roman Soldiers Mock Jesus

Let's expand the **Full Breakdown** to include **John 19:1–3** alongside Matthew and Mark, then trace the **imagery of the colors (scarlet and purple)** into the **tabernacle, priestly garments, and kingly imagery**.



## Gospel Texts Side by Side

Gospel	Passage	Robe Color	Key Actions
● Matthew	27:27–31a	<b>Scarlet</b> (κόκκινον / <i>kokkinon</i> )	Soldiers take Jesus into the Praetorium, strip Him, place scarlet robe, twist crown of thorns, give Him a reed as scepter, kneel and mock Him, spit on Him, strike Him, then lead Him away.
● Mark	15:16–20a	<b>Purple</b> (πορφύραν / <i>porphyra</i> )	Soldiers gather cohort, clothe Him in purple, weave crown of thorns, salute “King of the Jews,” strike His head with reed, spit on Him, kneel in mock homage, then strip off the purple robe.
● John	19:1–3	<b>Purple</b> (πορφύραν / <i>porphyra</i> )	Pilate has Him flogged; soldiers twist crown of thorns, put purple robe on Him, approach saying “Hail, King of the Jews!” and strike Him in the face.



## Historical & Cultural Context

### Roman Mockery Ritual

- Common Roman practice: mock condemned rebels who claimed kingship.
- Elements of parody:
  - **Robe (royal garment)** – Jesus clothed in scarlet/purple.
  - **Crown (thorns)** – parody of imperial wreaths of victory.
  - **Reed/staff** – parody of a king's scepter.
  - **Mock homage** – soldiers kneel and bow, mimicking real oaths to Caesar.

### The Praetorium

- Likely Pilate's headquarters in Jerusalem (either Antonia Fortress or Herod's old palace).
- A “cohort” (σπεῖρα) could mean hundreds, though probably a large group, not the full 600.



## Color of the Robe(s)

- **Matthew: scarlet (kokkinon)** – the color of a Roman military cloak. Connected with **blood, war, and sacrifice**.
- **Mark & John: purple (porphyra)** – the imperial color of kings and emperors. Connected with **royalty, wealth, and authority**.
- **Historical overlap:** Scarlet and purple dyes could appear similar depending on material, age, and lighting. Likely the robe was a **faded red-purple military cloak**.
- **Theological harmony:**
  - Scarlet = priestly and sacrificial imagery.
  - Purple = kingly and royal imagery.
  - Together, Jesus is portrayed as **Priest-King**, fulfilling both offices.

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## Tabernacle & Priestly/Kingly Garment Connections

### 1. Tabernacle Curtains & Veil (Exod 26:1, 31)

- The fabric of the Tabernacle used **scarlet, purple, and blue** threads woven with fine linen.
- These colors symbolized **God's heavenly throne room and the meeting place between God and man**.
- Jesus clothed in scarlet/purple visually recalls the **veil** of the Tabernacle—His body itself becomes the new veil (cf. Heb 10:20).

### 2. High Priest's Garments (Exod 28:5–6, 15)

- The ephod and breastpiece were woven of **gold, blue, purple, scarlet, and fine linen**.
- Jesus mocked in these colors ironically fulfills His role as the **true High Priest** (Heb 4:14–16), offering Himself as sacrifice.

### 3. Royal Robes (Judges 8:26; Esther 8:15)

- Purple robes were a symbol of royalty in the ANE (Ancient Near East) and Roman world.
- By putting purple on Jesus, the soldiers mocked Him, but Scripture reveals Him as **the Davidic King** (2 Sam 7; Luke 1:32–33).

### 4. Scarlet → Sacrifice / Blood

- Scarlet was associated with **atonement** (Lev 14:6, Num 19:6).
- Jesus in scarlet connects Him to the **sacrificial lamb** whose blood purifies.

### 5. Purple → Kingship

- Purple linked to **imperial Rome** and the Caesars.
- Jesus in purple is the **true Caesar**, the King before whom every knee shall bow (Phil 2:10–11).



## Theological Implications

### 1. Priest & King United

- In Israel, kings and priests were separate offices. In Jesus, the colors show He is both the eternal **Priest (Hebrews)** and **King (Messiah Son of David)**.

### 2. Mockery Turned Prophecy

- Soldiers meant humiliation, but in reality, they acted out a coronation.
- They proclaimed “King of the Jews” in derision, but it was true.

### 3. The New Tabernacle / Veil

- Jesus wearing scarlet and purple recalls the **veil of the Tabernacle**. When His body is torn on the cross, the veil of the Temple is torn (Matt 27:51), revealing God's presence now open to all.

### 4. Blood and Glory Together

- Scarlet (blood) and purple (glory) converge in Jesus' passion.
- His shame is His enthronement.



## Key Greek Words

- **Kokkinon** (κόκκινον) = scarlet, vivid red.
- **Porphyra** (πορφύρα) = purple dye from murex shellfish, costly and royal.
- **Akanthinon** (ἀκάνθινον) = thorny, used for the crown.
- **Enepaizon** (ἐνέπαιζον) = to mock, ridicule.

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## Gospel Witness

- **Matthew 27:27** – “Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole cohort around Him.”  
→ It says “**the governor’s soldiers**” — meaning Roman troops under Pilate’s authority.
- **Mark 15:16** – “The soldiers led Him away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium), and they called together the whole cohort.”  
→ Again, explicitly **Roman soldiers** stationed with Pilate.
- **John 19:1–3** – “Then Pilate took Jesus and had Him flogged. The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns, put it on His head and clothed Him in a purple robe.”  
→ Pilate gives the order, and **Roman soldiers** carry it out.



## Historical Context: Roman Soldiers in Judea

- Pilate had at his disposal **auxiliary troops** stationed in Jerusalem, likely at the **Antonia Fortress** near the Temple, or possibly in Herod’s palace.
- These were not elite Roman legions but **auxiliaries** — often non-Jewish recruits from neighboring regions (Samaritans, Syrians, Idumeans, etc.) serving under Roman command.
- They were known for **brutality toward Jews**, which makes sense of the savage mocking.



## Who Exactly Did It?

1. **Pilate gave the command** (John 19:1).
2. **Roman soldiers under Pilate’s authority** carried it out.
  - Likely members of the **cohort** (σπεῖρα / **speira**) gathered around Him.
  - A “cohort” at full strength = ~600 men, but here it probably means a large detachment available at the palace.



## Why This Matters Theologically

- Jesus is not mocked by random bystanders but by **Rome’s official soldiers under Pilate’s direct authority**.
- This makes the humiliation **state-sponsored** — not just a spontaneous act of cruelty.
- Symbolically, both **Jewish leaders (Sanhedrin)** and **Gentile rulers (Rome)** participate in rejecting the Messiah (cf. Acts 4:27: “Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus.”).



## Reflection

What Rome meant as humiliation, God turned into a **prophetic confirmation of Messiah’s mission**. Every slap, every spit, every mock “Hail, King of the Jews!” was Scripture unfolding in front of them.

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## Prophecy & Fulfillment

OT Prophecy	Text	NT Fulfillment
<b>Psalms 22:6–8</b>	<i>“But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by everyone, despised by the people. All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads: ‘He trusts in the LORD,’ they say, ‘let the LORD rescue him.’”</i>	Roman soldiers surround Jesus, mock Him as “King of the Jews,” spit on Him, and bow in fake homage (MT 27:28–31; MK 15:17–19; JN 19:2–3).
<b>Psalms 22:16</b>	<i>“Dogs surround me, a pack of evildoers encircles me; they pierce my hands and my feet.”</i>	The “dogs” (a Jewish idiom for Gentiles) = Roman soldiers. They encircle Jesus in the Praetorium, later crucify Him, and drive nails through His hands and feet.
<b>Psalms 22:18</b>	<i>“They divide my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment.”</i>	Soon after mocking, the soldiers literally fulfill this at the cross (MT 27:35; JN 19:23–24).
<b>Isaiah 50:6</b>	<i>“I gave my back to those who strike, and my cheeks to those who pull out the beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting.”</i>	Soldiers scourge Jesus’ back (John 19:1), strike His face (John 19:3), and spit on Him (Matthew 27:30; Mark 15:19).
<b>Isaiah 52:14</b>	<i>“His appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any human being and his form marred beyond human likeness.”</i>	After scourging and beating, Jesus is disfigured, crowned with thorns, face struck repeatedly.
<b>Isaiah 53:3–5</b>	<i>“He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering... He was pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.”</i>	The mocking, scourging, and eventual crucifixion fulfill the Suffering Servant role — wounded and crushed on behalf of sinners.



## Why Roman Soldiers Are Key

- **Gentile fulfillment of prophecy:** The Psalms describe mockers as “dogs” (a Jewish term for Gentiles). The Roman soldiers literally embody this.
- **Global rejection:** Both **Jewish leaders** (handing Him over) and **Gentile rulers** (executing the mockery) participate, fulfilling Psalm 2:1–2 (*“The kings of the earth take their stand, and the rulers gather together against the LORD and His Anointed One.”*).
- **Priest-King Imagery:** They robe Him in scarlet/purple — colors from the **Tabernacle and priestly garments** — without knowing they are dressing the true High Priest and King.



## Theological Meaning

- The Roman soldiers thought they were ridiculing a failed rebel.
- In reality, they were **unwittingly acting out prophecy** written hundreds of years earlier.
- Their actions crowned Jesus with the symbols of both **sacrifice (scarlet/blood)** and **kingship (purple/royalty)**, fulfilling His role as the **Priest-King who suffers to redeem His people**.