

St. John Passion BWV 245.5 (version IV, 1749)

Erster Teil

1. Herr, unser Herrscher, dessen Ruhm
In allen Landen herrlich ist!
Zeig uns durch deine Passion,
Dass du, der wahre Gottessohn,
Zu aller Zeit,
Auch in der grössten Niedrigkeit,
Verherrlicht worden bist!

2. *Jesus ging mit seinen Jüngern über den Bach Kidron, da war ein Garte, darein ging Jesus und seine Jünger. Judas aber, der ihn verriet, wusste den Ort auch, denn Jesus versammelte sich oft daselbst mit seinen Jüngern. Da nun Judas zu sich hatte genommen² die Schar, und*

Part 1

1. Lord, our ruler, whose praise
Is glorious in all lands!
Show us through your Passion
That you, the true son of God,
Throughout all time,
Even in the greatest abjection,¹
Have been glorified.

2. *Jesus went [out from Jerusalem]³ with his disciples across the brook Kidron, [to a place] where there was a garden, where Jesus and his disciples went in. Judas, however, who betrayed him, also knew the spot, for Jesus often gathered in that place with his disciples. Now when Judas had engaged*

GENERAL NOTE: J. S. Bach is known to have performed the *St. John Passion* four times in versions that differ textually and musically from each other in varying degrees. Version I (BWV 245.1, 1724) does not survive in complete musical sources, but its text is known with good certainty. Version II (BWV 245.2, 1725) includes several replacement or additional arias, and new interpolations from Matthew's gospel. Version III (BWV 245.3, c.1730) restored some movements but replaced others with musical numbers now lost. Version IV (BWV 245.5, 1749) restored most of the text and music from Version I, with revised words in several numbers. Between versions III and IV Bach began creating a new score, musically revising the first ten numbers of the passion in 1739. His work was completed around 1749 by an assistant who presumably just copied the readings in Bach's composing score (without revising). The setting in this partially revised score, which does not represent a version performed under Bach, is now known as BWV 245.4. Most modern performances present a conflated hybrid text based on editions by Arthur Mendel (both in an influential performing score and the critical text of the New Bach Edition) or on similar modern editions that likewise mix Bach's earlier and revised musical materials while mostly retaining the verbal texts of the earlier versions. A 1728 publication of collected liturgical poetry compiled by Christoph Birkmann includes the libretto from the 1725 version of the *St. John Passion*; it was presumably based on the now-lost printed booklets that were distributed to Bach's congregation, but its exact relationship to the work is not certain.

¹"Niedrigkeit" is somewhat ambiguous. The only passage in the Luther Bibles of Bach's day that uses the word in connection with Jesus is Acts 8:33, "In seiner Niedrigkeit ist sein Gerichte erhaben" ("In his abjection is his judgment taken up"). Later German Bibles typically use the word "Erniedrigung" ("humiliation") here instead. The underlying Greek word, "tapeinosis," can mean "low estate" or "humiliation," or both. Luther's biblical commentaries indicate that he intended both senses with his use of the word "Niedrigkeit" in Acts 8:33, and "abjection" is probably the best rendering in English to capture this double meaning.

²The 1728 printed libretto here gives "genommen hatte" instead of "hatte genommen"; there is no difference in meaning in this context.

³At Passover, Jerusalem itself was always overcrowded with pilgrims. Where Jesus and the disciples (who were visiting from Galilee) went out to stay overnight was still within the area that, at the time, was considered ritually proper for pilgrims to be during the festival.

der Hohenpriester und Pharisäer Diener, kommt er dahin mit Fackeln, Lampen und mit Waffen. Als nun Jesus wusste alles, was ihm begegnen sollte, ging er hinaus und sprach zu ihnen: Wen suchet ihr? Sie antworteten ihm: Jesum von Nazareth. Jesus spricht zu ihnen: Ich bins. Judas aber, der ihn verriet, stund auch bei ihnen. Als nun Jesus zu ihnen⁴ sprach: Ich bins, wichen sie zurück⁵ und fielen zu Boden. Da fraget⁶ er sie abermal: Wen suchet ihr? Sie aber sprachen: Jesum

the band [of Roman soldiers],⁷ and attendants⁸ of the chief priests⁹ and of the Pharisees,¹⁰ he comes¹¹ there with torches, lanterns, and with weapons. Now as Jesus knew everything that should happen to him [according to scriptural prophecy], he went out and declares¹² to them: “Whom are you seeking?” They answered him: “Jesus of Nazareth.” Jesus declares¹³ to them: “That, ‘I am.’”¹⁴ Judas, however, who betrayed him, also stood among them. Now as Jesus declared to them, “That, ‘I am,’” they drew

⁴The 1728 printed libretto here lacks “zu ihnen” (“to them”).

⁵In his 1739 score, Bach set this with an extra syllable, “zurück”; for the 1724, 1725, and 1749 versions, and in the 1728 printed libretto, the text here reads “zurück.” There is no difference in meaning.

⁶In his 1739 score, Bach revised this with an extra syllable, “fragete” (“asked”). In Bach’s 1724, 1725, and 1749 versions the text here reads “fraget” (“asks”; i.e., in the historical present tense). The 1728 printed libretto here reads “fragte” (“asked”).

⁷“Schar” is Luther’s rendering of John’s “speira,” a technical term that in the New Testament always refers to a “cohort” of Roman soldiers. Luther’s commentaries on the passion narrative in John make clear that his “die Schar” refers to “the band of Roman soldiers.” This term does not refer to “the Jewish crowd” (indeed, there is no talk of a “crowd” of any sort in John’s passion narrative or in Luther’s rendering of it, nor of a “mob”). Also, neither “speira” nor “Schar” (nor “Knechte,” nor “Kriegsknechte”) refer to “the Jewish troops,” a textually unwarranted interpretation sometimes encountered in modern commentary on Bach’s *St. John Passion*. The author of the Gospel of John, a writer living under Roman rule, would most unlikely have employed a technical Roman military term, “speira,” to denote a group of Jewish soldiers, had there even been any Jewish soldiers under the Roman occupation of Judea. The “speira” are a group distinguished from the “attendants” of the chief priests and of the Pharisees. That “the soldiers” more generally (Luther, “die Kriegsknechte”) were not Jews is also evident from the fact that “the soldiers” later (in movement 21) mock Jesus inside the hall of judgment—“the Jews,” according to John’s narrative (movement 16), do not go in the hall of judgment so that they would not be ritually defiled.

⁸Luther’s “Diener” (“attendants”) does not mean “officers,” a rendering sometimes given in modern translations of the *St. John Passion*. Also, these attendants are not part of “die Schar” (“the band/cohort”). The “band,” or “cohort” (not “crowd”), consists of “Kriegsknechte” (“[Roman] soldiers”).

⁹Luther Bibles of Bach’s day use “die Hohepriester” (plural) to refer to the rotation of priests who worked in the Jerusalem Temple, and “der Hohepriester” (singular) to the head priest of them all. Partly to avoid potential narrative confusion, it became conventional in English translations of the Bible to call the former “the chief priests” and the latter “the high priest.” The original Greek of the New Testament text gives “hoi archiereis” (literally, “the chief priests”) and “ho archiereus” (literally, “the chief priest”).

¹⁰Pharisees were a Jewish movement that cultivated and promoted oral Torah. After 70 C.E., rabbis who followed Pharisee attitudes toward oral religious law are believed to have been central to the Judaism known to the canonical Gospel writers. These writers tend to give a similar prominence to the Pharisees in their stories about Jesus, sometimes for polemic reasons, sometimes by presumably unintended anachronism. Some recent historical research contends that there was no substantial conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees: Jesus was executed by the Romans, and if Jews did have anything to do with the crucifixion, it would have been at the instigation of those who had access to Pilate, principally the leaders of the priesthood. Other research argues that there was actually some serious opposition to Jesus from the Pharisees.

¹¹Historical present tense (that is, “he comes” rather than “he came”) in John and Luther. John’s narrative mixes the two tenses, perhaps to give a sense of dramatic immediacy; so does Luther’s translation, but not exactly as in John’s text.

¹²Historical present tense in John but not Luther.

¹³Historical present tense in John and Luther.

¹⁴Literally, “I am it” (as opposed to “It is me,” or “I am he”).

von Nazareth. Jesus antwortete: *Ich hab's euch gesagt, dass ichs sei, suchet ihr denn mich, so lasset diese gehen!*¹⁵

**3. O grosse Lieb, o Lieb ohn alle Masse,
Die dich gebracht auf diese Marterstrasse!
Ich lebte mit der Welt in Lust und Freuden,
Und du musst leiden.**¹⁸

4. *Auf dass das Wort erfüllet würde, welches er sagte:*¹⁹
*Ich habe der keine verloren, die du mir gegeben hast. Da hatte Simon Petrus ein Schwert und zog es aus und schlug nach des Hohenpriesters Knecht und hieb ihm sein recht Ohr ab; und der Knecht hiess Malchus. Da sprach Jesus zu Petro: Stecke dein Schwert in die Scheide! Soll ich den Kelch nicht trinken, den mir mein Vater gegeben hat?*²⁰

**5. Dein Will gescheh, Herr Gott, zugleich
Auf Erden wie im Himmelreich.
Gib uns Geduld in Leidenszeit,
Gehorsam sein in Lieb und Leid;**

*back and fell to the ground.*¹⁶ *Then he asks*¹⁷ *them once more: “Whom are you seeking?” They again declared: “Jesus of Nazareth.” Jesus answered: “I have said this to you—that, “I am”; if you are seeking me, then let these [others] go.”*

**3. O great love, o love beyond all measure,
That has brought you on this path of torment!
I [have] lived with the world in delight and joy,
And you must suffer.**

4. *So that what he [had] said, the Word, would be fulfilled.*²¹ *“I have not lost one [follower] of those whom you [God the father] have given me.” Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it out and struck at the high priest’s*²² *servant and cut his right ear off; and the servant’s name was Malchus. Then Jesus declared to Peter: “Put your sword into its scabbard. Shall I not drink the cup*²³ *that my father has given me?”*

**5. May your will be done, Lord God, alike
On earth as [it is] in the kingdom of heaven.
Give us patience in time of suffering,
To be obedient in love and woe;**

¹⁵John 18:1-8.

¹⁶The Greek “ego eimi” (“I am”), in the voice of a divine figure, is understood as an expression of self-revelation in the New Testament and in the Septuagint (the ancient Jewish Greek translation of the Torah and, eventually, the entire Hebrew Bible, with some additional Greek texts). Because Jesus’s “Ich bins” (“It/That, ‘I am’”) here is a divine utterance (a theophany), all those in his presence fall involuntarily to the ground.

¹⁷Past tense, however, in John and Luther.

¹⁸A stanza of “Herzliebster Jesu, was hast du verbrochen?”

¹⁹The 1728 printed libretto here reads “Auf das erfüllet würde, welches er sagte” (“So that what he [had] said would be fulfilled”).

²⁰John 18:9-11.

²¹Jesus’s words in John 17:12, understood as the “word/Word of God”; in John 1:1, Jesus is called “das Wort bei Gott” (“the word/Word with God”); and Colossians 3:16 speaks of “das Wort Christi” (“the word/Word of Christ”).

²²Luther Bibles of Bach’s day use “die Hohepriester” (plural) to refer to the rotation of priests who work in the Jerusalem Temple, and “der Hohepriester” (singular) to the head priest of them all. Partly to avoid potential narrative confusion, it became conventional in English translations of the Bible to call the former “the chief priests” and the latter “the high priest.” The original Greek of the New Testament text gives “hoi archiereis” (literally, “the chief priests”) and “ho archiereus” (literally, “the chief priest”).

²³In biblical language, “the cup” is a metaphor for what God has to offer a person, whether positive (e.g., “the cup of consolation”) or negative (e.g., “the cup of wrath,” and “the cup of suffering”).

**Wehr und steur allem²⁴ Fleisch und Blut,
Das wider deinen Willen tut!²⁵**

6. Die Schar aber und der Oberhauptmann und die Diener der Jüden nahmen Jesum und bunden ihn und führeten ihn aufs erste zu Hannas, der war Kaiphass Schwäher, welcher des Jahres Hoherpriester war. Es war aber Kaiphass, der den²⁷ Jüden riet, es wäre gut, dass ein Mensch würde umbracht für das Volk.²⁸

7. Von den Stricken meiner Sünden
Mich zu entbinden,³¹
Wird mein Heil gebunden.
Mich von allen Lasterbeulen
Völlig zu heilen,³²
Lässt er sich verwunden.

8. Simon Petrus aber folgte Jesu nach und ein ander Jünger.³⁵

**Restrain²⁶ and hold in check all flesh and blood
That acts against your will.**

6. The band, however, and the captain [of the band of Roman soldiers] and the attendants of the Jews took Jesus and bound him and led him at first to Annas (the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the one who was high priest in that year). But it was Caiaphas who advised the Jews it would be good that one person would be put to death²⁹ for³⁰ the people.

7. To unbind me
From the snares of my sins,³³
My salvation [Jesus] is bound.
To heal me fully
Of all vice-boils,³⁴
He lets himself be wounded.

8. Simon Peter, however, followed Jesus and [so did] another disciple.

²⁴The 1728 printed libretto here reads “allen” (i.e., “all” as plural instead of as a singular).

²⁵A stanza of “Vater unser im Himmelreich.”

²⁶“Wehren” is used here in one of its older-German senses, of “verhindern” (“get in the way of,” “restrain”) or “verbieten” (“to forbid”).

²⁷The 1728 printed libretto here reads “der den’n [i.e., ‘denen’] Jüden riet” (“who advised those Jews”).

²⁸John 18:12-14.

²⁹The word “umbracht” here is a standard older-German alternative version of “umgebracht,” the past tense of “umbringen” (“to bring down” in its sense of “to kill/murder”). It is not the past tense of “umbrechen” (“to plow up [a field]” or “to break up/down,” which might be theologically conceived, here, as a metaphor for the breaking up of bread, “the [physical] body of Christ,” in the Lutheran sacrament of communion). Here in John 18:14 and elsewhere, the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day employ “umbracht” as the past tense of “umbringen.”

³⁰The expression “für das Volk” (“for the people”) here is ambiguous (as is also true of the underlying Greek words “hyper tou laou”): it can mean “instead of the people” or “on behalf of the people,” and this double meaning was apparently intended. See also John 11:50, where Caiaphas had said, “Es ist uns besser, ein Mensch sterbe für das Volk, denn dass das ganze Volk verderbe” (“It is better for us [Jews that] one person may die for the people, than that the entire people may be destroyed [by the Romans]).

³¹The 1728 printed libretto here reads “Mich vom Stricke meiner Sünden zu entbinden” (“To unbind me from the snare of my sins”).

³²The 1728 printed libretto here reads “Von der Laster Eiterbeulen mich zu heilen” (“To heal me of purulent vice-boils”).

³³The notion of a “Sündenstrick” (“sin’s snare”) was derived from Proverbs 5:22, which in the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day reads “Die Missetat des Gottlosen wird ihn fahen, und er wird mit dem Strick seiner Sünde gehalten werden” (“The godless one’s misdeed will entrap him, and he will be held [fast] with the snare of his sin”). This “Sündenstrick” was also associated with the “Teufelsstrick” (“devil’s snare”) of 2 Timothy 2:26.

³⁴“Lasterbeulen” are “vice-boils,” not “blasphemy-boils” (which would have been “Lästerbeulen”).

³⁵John 18:15a.

9. Ich folge dir gleichfalls, mein Heiland, mit Freuden
Und lasse dich nicht,
Mein Heiland, mein Licht.
Mein sehnlicher Lauf
Hört eher nicht auf,
Bis dass du mich lehrest, geduldig zu leiden.

9. I will follow you likewise, my savior, with joy,
And will not let you go,³⁶
My savior, my light.
My ardent course [in the life of faith]³⁷
Will not cease before
The point that you teach me to suffer patiently.

10. *Derselbige Jünger war dem Hohenpriester bekannt und ging mit Jesu hinein in des Hohenpriesters Palast. Petrus aber stund draussen für der Tür. Da ging der andere Jünger, der dem Hohenpriester bekannt war, hinaus und redete mit der Türhüterin und führete Petrum hinein. Da sprach die Magd, die Türhüterin, zu Petro: Bist du nicht dieses Menschen Jünger einer?*³⁸ *Er sprach: Ich bins nicht. Es stunden aber die Knechte und Diener und hatten ein Kohlfew gemacht (denn es war kalt) und wärmten sich. Petrus aber stund bei ihnen und wärmete sich.*³⁹ *Aber der Hohepriester fragte Jesum um seine Jünger und um seine Lehre. Jesus antwortete ihm:*⁴⁰ *Ich habe frei, öffentlich geredet für der Welt. Ich habe allezeit gelehret in der Schule und in dem Tempel, da alle Jüden zusammenkommen, und habe nichts im Verborgnen*⁴¹ *geredt. Was fragest du mich darum? Frage die darum, die gehöret haben, was ich zu ihnen geredet*

10. *This same disciple was known to the high priest and went with Jesus into the high priest's palace. Peter, however, stood outside, in front of the door. Then the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke with the woman keeping the door and led Peter in. Then the maid, the doorkeeper, declared*⁴² *to Peter: "Are you not one of this person's disciples?" He declared:*⁴³ *"That, I am not." But the servants*⁴⁴ *[of the priests] and attendants stood around, having made a charcoal fire (for it was cold), and warmed themselves. But Peter stood among them and warmed himself. But the high priest asked Jesus about his disciples and about his teaching. Jesus answered him: "I have spoken freely and openly before*⁴⁵ *the world. I have always taught in the synagogue*⁴⁶ *and in the Temple, where all Jews come together, and have spoken nothing in secret. Why do you ask me about this? About this, ask those who have heard what I have spoken*

³⁶This is an allusion to Genesis 32:26, the story of Jacob's wrestling with God at Peniel. God says to Jacob, "Lass mich gehen" ("Let me go"), and Jacob answers, "Ich lasse dich nicht [gehen], du segnest mich denn" ("I will not let you [go], unless you bless me"). According to Luther's radically Christocentric reading of the Hebrew Scriptures, it was actually Christ himself whom Jacob wrestled with at Peniel.

³⁷The biblical metaphor of the life of faith as a race course (in the Luther Bibles of Bach's day, "Lauf") is set forth most clearly in 2 Timothy 4:7 and 1 Corinthians 9:24.

³⁸The 1728 printed libretto here reads "Bist du nicht auch dieses Menschen Jünger einer?" ("Are you not also one of this person's disciples?").

³⁹The 1728 printed libretto lacks this sentence.

⁴⁰The 1728 printed libretto here reads "Jesus antwortete ihnen" ("Jesus answered them [i.e., the high priest and the attendants and servants]").

⁴¹The 1728 printed libretto here reads not "im Verborgnen" but "in Verborgnen"; there is no difference in meaning.

⁴²Historical present tense in John but not Luther.

⁴³Historical present tense in John but not Luther.

⁴⁴"Die Knechte" are not "the soldiers" (as this is sometimes rendered in modern translations of the libretto), but "the servants" of the Jewish chief priests and high priest.

⁴⁵As is the case at several other spots in the libretto, the old form "für" appears where modern German would use "vor." (The libretto's usage of "vor" and "für" is not consistent.)

⁴⁶"Schule" here does not really mean "school," as it is sometime rendered in modern translation of the libretto. The Luther Bibles of Bach's day used as various renderings of the New Testament Greek's "sunagoge" ("synagogue") the words "Schule," "Jüden-Schule," and "Jüden-Schul."

habe! Siehe, dieselbigen wissen, was ich gesaget habe. Als er aber solches redete, gab der Diener einer, die dabeistunden, Jesu einen Backenstreich und sprach: Solltest du dem Hohenpriester also antworten? Jesus aber⁴⁷ antwortete: Hab ich übel geredt, so beweise es, dass es böse sei, hab ich aber recht geredt, was schlägest du mich?⁴⁸

**11. Wer hat dich so geschlagen,
Mein Heil, und dich mit Plagen
So übel zugericht?
Du bist ja nicht ein Sünder
Wie wir und unsre Kinder,
Von Missetaten weisst du nicht.**

**Ich, ich und meine Sünden,
Die sich wie Körnlein finden
Des Sandes an dem Meer,
Die haben dir erregt
Das Elend, das dich schläget,
Und das betrübte Marterheer.⁵¹**

12. Und Hannas sandte ihn gebunden zu dem Hohenpriester Kaiphas. Simon Petrus stund und wärmete sich,⁵⁵ da sprachen sie zu ihm: Bist du nicht seiner

to them. Look, these same ones know what I have said.⁴⁹ But as he spoke such things, one of the attendants standing nearby gave Jesus a blow to the cheek⁵⁰ and declared: “Should you answer the high priest like that?” But Jesus answered: “If I have spoken badly, then prove that it be evil; but if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?”

**11. Who has struck you so,
My salvation, and battered you
So badly with wound-marks?⁵²
You are indeed not a sinner,
As we and our children [are];
You do not have experience of [committing] misdeeds.⁵³**

**I, I and my sins,
Which are as [countless as] the little grains
Of sand on the seashore,
They have caused you
The misery that strikes you
And the grievous host of torments.⁵⁴**

12. And Annas sent him, bound, to the high priest Caiaphas. Simon Peter stood and warmed himself, when they declared to him: “Are you not one of his disciples?”

⁴⁷The 1728 printed libretto here lacks the word “aber” (“but”).

⁴⁸John 18:15b-23.

⁴⁹Jesus is quoting God’s words from Isaiah 45:18-19, “Denn so spricht der HERR: ... Ich bin der HERR, und ist keiner mehr; ich habe nicht in verborgene geredet (“For so declares the LORD: ... I am the LORD and there is no other; I have not spoken in secret”).

⁵⁰“Backenstreich” (literally, a “strike of [i.e., to] the cheek”) was an older-German, loftier synonym for the more common expressions “Ohrfeige” (“slap in the face”; literally, “smack of the ear”) and “Maulschelle” (“box on the ear”; literally, “swat of the muzzle”). Consider also Luther’s rendering of Matthew 5:39, where Jesus says “so dir jemand einen Streich gibt auf deinen rechten Backen, dem biete den anderen auch dar” (“if someone gives you a blow to your right cheek, offer him the other [cheek] also”).

⁵¹Two stanzas of “O Welt, sieh hier dein Leben.”

⁵²The most general sense of the word “Plage” in older German was given in the leading eighteenth-century German dictionary as “Ein Schlag, ein Streich, ... und figurlich auch die dadurch verursachte Wunde” (“A blow, a stroke, ... and figuratively also the wound caused by it.”). In older English the word “plague” could likewise mean “a blow, a smiting.” Psalm 89:33, in the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day, reads “so will ich ihre Sünde mit der Rute heimsuchen und ihre Missetat mit Plagen” (“Then will I visit their sin with the rod, and their misdeed with strokes/wounds”). The last word of the sentence renders the plural of the Hebrew “nega,” which means variously “stroke,” “plague,” “wound,” “mark,” “plague-spot,” “wound-mark.”

⁵³Literally, “Of misdeeds know you not.” This line is not saying that Jesus was unaware of the existence of misdeeds or sin. The sense of the line derives from 2 Corinthians 5:21, “er hat den, der von keiner Sünde wusste, für uns zur Sünde gemacht” (“he [God] has made into sin for us him [Jesus] who knew of no sin [i.e., who had no personal experience of committing a sin]”). See also the text of line 2 in movement 15.

⁵⁴“Das betrübte Marterheer” in this line does not mean “the miserable band of torturers”; in the older-German word “Marterheer,” the “Heer” was understood as metaphorical, which makes the sense of “das betrübte Marterheer” to be “the grievous host of torments.”

⁵⁵The 1728 printed libretto here reads “Simon Petrus aber stund und wärmete sich” (“But Simon Peter stood and warmed himself”).

*Jünger einer?*⁵⁶ *Er leugnete aber und sprach: Ich bins nicht. Spricht des Hohenpriesters Knecht einer, ein Gefreundter des, dem Petrus das Ohr abgehauen hatte: Sahe ich dich nicht im Garten bei ihm?*⁵⁷ *Da verleugnete Petrus abermal, und alsobald krähete der Hahn.*⁵⁸ *Da gedachte Petrus an die Worte Jesu und ging hinaus und weinete bitterlich.*⁵⁹

13. Ach, mein Sinn,
Wo willst du endlich hin,
Wo soll ich mich erquicken?
Bleib ich hier,
Oder wünsch ich mir
Berg und Hügel auf den Rücken?
Bei der Welt ist gar kein Rat,
Und im Herzen
Stehn die Schmerzen
Meiner Missetat,
Weil der Knecht den Herrn verleugnet hat.

**14. Petrus, der nicht denkt zurück,
Seinen Gott verneinet,**

He denied [it] again and declared: “That, I am not.” One of the high priest’s servants, a kinsman of him whose ear Peter had cut off, declares:⁶⁰ “Did I not see you in the garden with him?” Then Peter disavowed [Jesus] once more, and immediately the cock crowed. Then Peter remembered the words of Jesus⁶¹ and went out and wept bitterly.

13. Ah, my sense [of good and evil],⁶²
Where, in the end, do you want to go;
Where shall I restore myself?⁶³
Shall I stay here,
Or do I wish
Mountains and hills [to fall]⁶⁴ upon my back?
With the world there is no counsel whatsoever,
And in my heart
Persist the agonies
Of my misdeed:
For the servant has disavowed the Lord.

**14. Peter, who does not think back [to Jesus’s word],
Disclaims his God;**

⁵⁶The 1728 printed libretto identifies this as a “Chor der Juden” (“Chorus of Jews”).

⁵⁷Although the narrative had just identified the person here as a “Knecht” (“servant”), the 1728 printed libretto identifies the speaker as “Diener” (“attendant”). It was earlier an attendant who gives Jesus a blow to the cheek, and it is now a servant who questions him.

⁵⁸John 18:24-27.

⁵⁹Matthew 26:75a and 26:75c, except for the word “gedachte,” which is taken from Luther’s rendering of the parallel passage in Mark 14:72b.

⁶⁰Historical present tense in John and Luther.

⁶¹This sentence was interpolated from Matthew 26:75. Peter is here remembering the words of Jesus in John 13:38 (Matthew 26:34).

⁶²The import of this line is derived from Hebrews 5:13-14, “Wem man noch Milch geben muss, der ist unerfahren in dem Wort der Gerechtigkeit, denn er ist ein junges Kind; den Vollkommenen aber gehört starke Speise, die durch Gewohnheit haben geübte Sinnen zum Unterscheid des Guten und des Bösen” (“Whomever one must still give ‘milk’ [as sole diet], that man is inexperienced in the word of righteousness, for he is [like] an infant; but ‘solid food’ belongs to the perfected, who by custom have [their] senses exercised to the discerning of good and evil”). The whole person, what the King James Bible calls the “heart and mind” (Luther Bibles, “Herz und Sinn”), is affected, but the present double response (movements 13 and 14) specifically emphasizes the “conscience” [Luther Bibles, “Gewissen”]—see especially the concluding line of movement 14: “Rühre mein Gewissen” (“Stir my conscience”).

⁶³“Restore” here is used in the sense of “restored to a proper sense of good and evil.” Lutherans would have considered any restoration to come from Jesus, a principle reflected in Matthew 11:28, where Jesus says, “Kommet her zu mir, alle, die ihr mühselig und beladen seid, ich will euch erquicken” (“Come here, to me, all you who are travailed and weighed down; I will restore you”).

⁶⁴This line does not mean “[Do I wish to have the] mountains and hills [be] behind me?” The line’s sense is derived from Luke 23:26-31, where Jesus says to the Daughters of Jerusalem, who are among the great number of the people lamenting his crucifixion, that the time is coming when it will be said to the mountains (Luther Bibles, “zu den Bergen”), “fall on us,” and to the hills (Luther Bibles, “zu den Hügeln”), “cover us.”

**Der doch auf ein ernsten Blick
Bitterlichen⁶⁵ weinet.
Jesu, blicke mich auch an,
Wenn ich nicht will büßen;
Wenn ich Böses hab getan,
Rühre mein Gewissen!⁶⁶**

Zweiter Teil

**15. Christus, der uns selig macht,
Kein Bös hat begangen,
Der ward für uns in der Nacht
Als ein Dieb gefangen,
Geführt für gottlose Leut
Und fälschlich verklaget,
Verlacht, verhöhnt und verspeit,
Wie denn die Schrift saget.⁶⁸**

**At a penetrating glance,⁶⁷ however,
He weeps bitterly.
Jesus, glance upon me as well,
Whenever I do not want to atone;
Whenever I have done something evil,
Stir my conscience.**

Part 2

**15. Christ, who makes us blessed [with salvation],
Has committed no evil;
For us, in the night, he was
Seized like a thief,
Led before godless people,⁶⁹
And falsely accused,
Mocked, scorned, and spat upon,
Just as the scripture⁷⁰ says.**

⁶⁵In older German the adverb “bitterlich” (“bitterly”) was sometimes spelled “bitterlichen.”

⁶⁶A stanza of “Jesu Leiden, Pein und Tod.”

⁶⁷This refers to the “Heiland-Blick” (“gaze of the Savior”) frequently cited in Lutheran sermons on the passion narrative. As explained, e.g., in Heinrich Müller’s passion sermons, several of which Bach himself owned, it is the warmth of Jesus’s metaphoric gaze that melts the ice of Peter’s heart into tears of repentance. This also was believed to help make sense of the references in the passion narrative to Peter’s continually trying to warm himself.

⁶⁸The first stanza of this hymn.

⁶⁹“Godless people” here refers to the Romans (the soldiers and Pilate, the Roman prefect of Judea) in the hall of judgment to which Jesus is now being led. See movement 16 that follows. The stanzas of this well-known chorale move in sequence through the events of the passion narrative, and the stanza immediately following this one likewise concerns Jesus before Pilate.

⁷⁰That is, the passion narrative of John 18:1–19:42, but referring also to elements of the passion narratives of Luke 22:39–23:46, Mark 14:26–15:47, and Matthew 26:30–27:66.

16. Da führeten sie Jesum von Kaipha vor das Richthaus, und es war frühe. Und sie gingen nicht in das Richthaus, auf dass sie nicht unrein würden, sondern Ostern essen möchten. Da ging Pilatus zu ihnen heraus und sprach: Was bringet ihr für Klage wider diesen Menschen? Sie antworteten und sprachen zu ihm: Wäre dieser nicht ein Übeltäter, wir hätten dir ihn nicht überantwortet. Da sprach Pilatus zu ihnen: So nehmet ihr ihn hin und richtet ihn nach eurem Gesetze!⁷¹ Da sprachen die Jüden zu ihm: Wir dürfen niemand töten. Auf dass erfüllet würde das Wort Jesu, welches er sagte, da er deutete, welches Todes er sterben würde. Da ging Pilatus wieder hinein in das Richthaus und rief Jesu und sprach zu ihm: Bist du der Jüden König? Jesus antwortete: Redest du das von dir selbst, oder habens dir andere von mir gesagt? Pilatus antwortete: Bin ich ein Jude? Dein Volk und die Hohenpriester haben dich mir überantwortet; was hast du getan? Jesus antwortete: Mein Reich ist nicht von dieser Welt; wäre mein Reich von dieser Welt, meine Diener würden darob kämpfen, dass ich den Jüden nicht überantwortet würde; aber nun ist mein Reich nicht von dannen.⁷²

16. Then they led⁷³ Jesus from Caiaphas before the hall of judgment, and it was early. And they did not go into the hall of judgment, so that they would not be [ritually] impure,⁷⁴ but might eat [of the] Easter [lamb].⁷⁵ Then Pilate went out to them and declared:⁷⁶ “What charge do you bring against this person?” They answered, declaring to him: “Were this one not an evildoer, we would not have handed him over to you.” Then Pilate declared to them: “So take him away and judge him according to your [own] law.” Then the Jews declared to him: “We are not permitted to put anyone to death.”⁷⁷ So that the Word of Jesus would be fulfilled—what he [had] said when he indicated what manner of death he would die.⁷⁸ Pilate then went back into the hall of judgment and summoned Jesus and declared to him: “Are you the King of the Jews?”⁷⁹ Jesus answered: “Are you speaking for yourself [when you declare] this, or have others said it to you of me?” Pilate answered: “Am I a Jew? Your people and the chief priests have handed you over to me; what have you done?” Jesus answered: “My kingdom is not from this world; were my kingdom from this world, my attendants would fight on that account,⁸⁰ [so] that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but now, my kingdom is not from here.”

⁷¹The 1728 printed libretto here reads “richtet ihn nach euren Gesetze” (“judge him according to your [own] laws”).

⁷²John 18:28-36.

⁷³Historical present tense in John but not Luther.

⁷⁴There are laws from the Hebrew Scriptures that can be cited for this (e.g., Numbers 9–11), but the text may simply be projecting theological irony against “the Jews.” Passages from the Mishnah concerning ritual impurity from exposure to rooms (like the hall of judgment) built over a burial place are also sometimes cited.

⁷⁵Luther’s use of “Oster” (“Easter”) here is apparently meant to distance the observance of this festival by Jesus and his followers as much as possible from the Jewishness of Passover. Luther and Lutheranism equivocated on whether the word “Oster” referred to the (Christian) festival of “Easter” or to the (Jewish) festival of “Passover,” with the latter also understood as prefiguring the former. Luther used both “Oster” and “Passah” for “Passover” in his translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, but he used only “Oster” in his New Testament. It may have been for its lack of Jewish associations that Luther chose the non-biblical word “Oster,” derived from the Anglo-Saxon goddess of spring, “Eostre” or “Ostara.” In older German, “Passah” was even defined as “das judische Osterfest” (“the Jewish Easter festival”); and in English, Passover has sometimes been referred to as “Jewish Easter.”

⁷⁶Historical present tense in John but not Luther.

⁷⁷“Töten” here has the specific meaning of “to put to death, as capital punishment,” not just “to kill.” At least as Christian scriptural tradition had it, it was the case under the legal conditions of Roman rule that capital punishment was mostly not permitted on the part of Jews or any non-Romans. There were a few charges for which Jews evidently were permitted to carry out death sentences, but by stoning, not crucifixion: for violating prohibitions against circulating in certain quarters of the Temple, and possibly for adultery. But current biblical scholarship supports the prohibition’s historicity for the specific charges against Jesus depicted in the Gospel, namely, being an evil-doer, making himself out to be divine, and making himself “the King of the Jews.”

⁷⁸That is, what Jesus said (understood as the “word/Word of God”) in John 12:32-33 (suggesting that he would die by crucifixion, the Roman method of execution); in John 1:1, Jesus is called “the word/Word of God.”

⁷⁹Anyone claiming kingship without Roman authority would have been considered an insurrectionist.

**17. Ach grosser König, gross zu allen Zeiten,
Wie kann ich gnugsam diese⁸¹ Treu ausbreiten?
Keins Menschen Herze mag indes ausdenken,⁸²
Was dir zu schenken.**

**Ich kanns mit meinen Sinnen nicht erreichen,
Womit doch dein Erbarmen zu vergleichen.
Wie kann ich dir denn deine Liebestaten
Im Werk erstatten?⁸³**

18. *Da sprach Pilatus zu ihm: So bist du dennoch ein König? Jesus antwortete: Du sagsts, ich bin ein König. Ich bin dazu geboren und in die Welt kommen, dass ich die Wahrheit zeugen soll. Wer aus der Wahrheit ist, der höret meine Stimme. Spricht Pilatus zu ihm: Was ist Wahrheit? Und da er das gesaget, ging er wieder hinaus zu den Jüden und spricht zu ihnen: Ich finde keine Schuld an ihm. Ihr habt aber eine Gewohnheit, dass ich euch einen losgebe;⁸⁵ wollt ihr nun, dass ich euch der Jüden König losgebe? Da schrieen sie wieder allesamt und sprachen: Nicht diesen, sondern Barrabam! Barrabas aber war ein Mörder. Da nahm Pilatus Jesum und geisselte ihn.⁸⁶*

**17. Ah great king, great throughout all the ages,
How can I adequately enlarge upon this faithfulness?
Meanwhile, no human heart may conceive of
What [is fit] to give you.**

**With my capacities I cannot arrive at
What indeed to compare your mercy with.
How can I, then, repay your acts of love
In [my pursuing] the work [of the Lord]?⁸⁴**

18. *Then Pilate declared to him: “So you are nonetheless a king?” Jesus answered: “You are saying so, [that] I am a king. For this I am begotten and come into the world: that I shall bear witness to the truth. Whoever is of the truth, he hears my voice.” Pilate declares⁸⁷ to him: “What is truth?” And when he had said this, he went back out to the Jews and declares⁸⁸ to them: “I find no fault in him. But you have a custom that I release someone to you. Now do you want me to release the King of the Jews to you?” Then they shouted back, all together, declaring: “Not this one, but Barabbas!”⁸⁹ But Barabbas was a murderer.⁹⁰ Pilate then took Jesus and scourged him.⁹¹*

⁸⁰“Darob” is an older-German synonym for “deshalb” (“on these grounds,” “for this reason”) and “darum” (in the sense of “for this reason,” “on that account”).

⁸¹The 1728 printed libretto here reads “solche Treu” (“such faithfulness”).

⁸²The 1728 printed libretto here reads “Keins Menschen Herz vermag es auszudenken, was dir zu schenken” (“No human heart is able to conceive of it, what [is fit] to give you”).

⁸³Two stanzas of “Herzliebster Jesu, was hast du verbrochen?”

⁸⁴This “the work”—which is in the singular, not plural (“works” would imply human actions, and Lutherans would have found abhorrent any hint that people’s good works might earn them favor in God’s eyes and thus eternal salvation)—presumably means “the work of the Lord” (i.e., the cultivation and furtherance of the Christian faith) that is spoken of in 1 Corinthians 15:58, “Meine lieben Brüder, seid feste, unbeweglich, und nehmet immer zu in dem Werk des HERRN” (“My dear brothers [in Christ], be steadfast, immovable [in your faith], and always grow/increase in the work of the LORD”).

⁸⁵The 1728 printed libretto here reads, as in Luther’s rendering of John 18:39, “Ihr habt aber eine Gewohnheit, dass ich euch einen auf Ostern losgebe” (“But you have a custom that at [Jewish] Easter [i.e., at Passover] I release someone to you”). Bach’s *St. John Passion* text does not include the words “auf Ostern” here in any version.

⁸⁶John 18:37-40, 19:1.

⁸⁷Historical present tense in John and Luther.

⁸⁸Historical present tense in John and Luther.

⁸⁹“Barabbas,” a name unknown in Jewish usage, means “son of the father.”

⁹⁰The underlying term in Greek can mean “robber” or “revolutionary,” but the Luther Bibles render it as “murderer.”

⁹¹With regard to Jesus’s scourging, Luther called Pilate (said in Luther’s translation to have carried out the act himself) “ein rechter Bluthund” (“a proper bloodhound”).

19. Betrachte, meine Seel, mit ängstlichem Vergnügen,
Mit bitterer Lust und halb beklemmtem Herzen
Dein höchstes Gut in Jesu Schmerzen,
Sieh hier auf Ruten, die ihn drängen,
Vor deine Schuld den Isop blühh
Und Jesu Blut auf dich zur Reinigung versprengen,
Drum sieh ohn Unterlass auf ihn!

20. Mein Jesu, ach! dein schmerzhaft bitter Leiden
Bringt tausend Freuden,
Es tilgt der Sünden Not.
Ich sehe zwar mit vielen Schrecken
Den heiligen Leib mit Blute decken;
Doch muss mir dies auch Lust erwecken,
Es macht mich frei von Höll und Tod.

21. *Und die Kriegsknechte flochten eine Krone von Dornen und satzten⁹⁴ sie auf sein Haupt und legten ihm ein Purpurkleid an und sprachen: Sei gegrüßet, lieber Jüdenkönig! Und gaben ihm Backenstreiche. Da ging Pilatus wieder heraus und sprach zu ihnen: Sehet, ich führe ihn heraus zu euch, dass ihr erkennet, dass ich keine Schuld an ihm finde. Also ging Jesus heraus und trug eine Dornenkrone und Purpurkleid. Und er sprach*

19. Ponder, my soul, with anxious pleasure,
With bitter delight and half-uneasy heart,
In Jesus's agonies your highest good;
Look here upon [how the scourging] rods that oppress him
Are blossoming⁹² hyssop for [healing⁹³] your guilt,
And sprinkling Jesus's blood on you for purification;
So look upon him without ceasing.

20. My Jesus, ah, your agonizing, bitter suffering
Brings [me] thousandfold joys;
It blots out the distress of sin.
I see, it is true, with many a terror
Your holy body being covered with blood;
Yet this must arouse in me also delight—
It makes me free of hell and death.

21. *And the soldiers⁹⁵ braided a crown of thorns and set it upon his head and laid a purple robe on him, declaring: "Greetings, dear King of the Jews!" And gave him blows to the cheek.⁹⁶ Then Pilate went back out and declared⁹⁷ to them [the Jews].⁹⁸ "Look, I am leading him out to you, so that you will recognize that I find no fault in him." So Jesus went out, wearing a crown of thorns and purple robe. And he [Pilate] declared⁹⁹ to them: "Look,*

⁹²“Rute ... blühh” (“rods ... are blossoming”) is an allusion to what German writers of Bach’s day called “Die blühende Ruthe Aaronis” (“The Blossoming Rod of Aaron”), which was depicted in Numbers 17:1-11. For ancient cultures, such miraculous rods were said to identify their owners as a legitimate hero or priest. In Numbers 17:10, God commands Moses to place “den Stecken Aaron” (“Aaron’s staff/walking-stick”) in the sanctuary. And in the New Testament, in Hebrews 9:4, it says that in the Holy of Holies of the sanctuary, the contents of Ark of the Covenant had included “die Rute Aarons, die gegrünet hatte” (“the rod of Aaron, which had grown verdant [with budding leaves]”). In Christian interpretation the budding rod of Aaron was regarded as a foreshadowing of Jesus’s miraculous birth and of his miraculous resurrection.

⁹³In German folk medicine “Isop” (“hyssop”) was a healing plant, a pilewort perennial, a “Gnadenkraut” (literally, “herb of grace”).

⁹⁴“Satzten” is an older-German spelling for “setzten (“to set”).

⁹⁵That is, the soldiers who formed the “Schar,” first mentioned in movement 2. “Kriegsknecht” was defined in the leading eighteenth-century German dictionary as “eine nunmehr veraltete Benennung eines gemeinen Soldaten, welche noch häufig in der Deutschen Bibel vorkommt” (“a now archaic designation for a common soldier, which yet frequently is found in the [orthographically but not verbally updated] German Bible [of Luther, still in current use in the eighteenth century]”). The number of soldiers is indefinite here in John’s narrative; in the parallel gospel passages, Mark 15:16 and Matthew 27:27, the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day speak of “die ganze Schar” of “Kriegsknechte” (“the entire cohort/band” of [technically, 600] “soldiers”).

⁹⁶“Backenstreich” (literally, a “strike of [i.e., to] the cheek”) was an older-German, loftier synonym for the more common expressions “Ohrfeige” (“slap in the face”; literally, “smack of the ear”) and “Maulschelle” (“box on the ear”; literally, “swat of the muzzle”). Consider also Luther’s rendering of Matthew 5:39, where Jesus says “so dir jemand einen Streich gibt auf deinen rechten Backen, dem biete den anderen auch dar” (“if someone gives you a blow to your right cheek, offer him the other [cheek] also”).

⁹⁷Historical present tense in John but not Luther.

⁹⁸The location (outside the hall of judgment) makes it clear that this “them” refers to the Jews (see movement 16), not to the Roman soldiers (who are inside the hall of judgment).

⁹⁹Historical present tense in John but not Luther.

zu ihnen: *Sehet, welch ein Mensch! Da ihn die Hohenpriester und die Diener sahen, schrieten sie und sprachen: Kreuzige, kreuzige!*¹⁰⁰ *Pilatus sprach zu ihnen: Nehmet ihr ihn hin und kreuziget ihn; denn ich finde keine Schuld an ihm! Die Jüden antworteten ihm:*¹⁰¹ *Wir haben ein Gesetz, und nach dem Gesetz soll er sterben; denn er hat sich selbst zu Gottes Sohn gemacht. Da Pilatus das Wort hörte, fürchtet er sich noch mehr und ging wieder hinein in das Richthaus, und spricht zu Jesu: Von wannen bist du? Aber Jesus gab ihm keine Antwort. Da sprach Pilatus zu ihm: Redest du nicht mit mir? Weissest du nicht,*¹⁰² *dass ich Macht habe, dich zu*

*what a man!*¹⁰³ *When the chief priests and the attendants looked at him, they shouted, declaring: “Crucify, crucify!” Pilate declared*¹⁰⁴ *to them: “Take him away and crucify him;*¹⁰⁵ *for I find no fault in him.” The Jews answered him: “We have a law, and according to that law*¹⁰⁶ *he ought to die: for he has made himself the son of God.” When Pilate heard this statement, he was more afraid yet,*¹⁰⁷ *and went back into the hall of judgment, and declares*¹⁰⁸ *to Jesus: “Where do you come from?” But Jesus gave him no answer. Then Pilate declared*¹⁰⁹ *to him: “Will you not speak with me? Do you not know that I have power to crucify you, and have power to release*

¹⁰⁰Although the narrative had just identified the group here as the (Jewish) chief priests and the (Jewish) attendants, the heading in the 1728 printed libretto identifies more broadly those who are singing this utterance as “[Das] Volk,” by which would be meant the Jewish people in general. (In German, “the people” in general, Jews and gentiles together, would much more likely be called “die Leute,” not “das Volk.”) See also the “gottlose Leut” (“Godless people”) in line 5 of movement 15.

¹⁰¹The narrative had just identified the group here as “die Jüden” (“the Jews”), and the heading in the 1728 printed libretto identifies this utterance as sung by “[Das] Volk,” evidently (and accurately) equating “das Volk” with “die Jüden.”

¹⁰²The 1728 printed libretto here reads “Redest du nicht mit mir, und weissest du nicht” (“Will you not speak with me, and do you not know”).

¹⁰³The precise import of this line, and of its underlying Greek text, is much contested. The Greek source text reads “kai legei autois, idou ho anthropos” (literally, “And [he] says/declares to them: ‘Behold the person/man!’”). Strictly grammatically speaking, the “he” in the text who utters these words appears to be Jesus, not Pilate. In this (unlikely) reading one might understand the gospel to depict Jesus’s declaring of Pilate, the Roman soldiers, and the Jews: “See what humankind is like!” But the speaker was most likely meant to be taken as Pilate, and the simplest and most likely construal is that he was declaring of Jesus: “Look at this poor fellow.” Very often, however, “Behold the man” is interpreted theologically, Pilate’s having (unwittingly) declared: “Behold the Man [of Sorrows]” (i.e., applying the language of the suffering servant in Isaiah 53 to Jesus), or “Behold the [Son of] Man.” Luther’s translation, “Sehet [i.e., in the imperative plural], welch ein Mensch!” (literally, “Look, what a person/man!”) was taken in Lutheranism to mean “Look, what a great man this is!” This reading strongly emphasizes a specific theological message—the glory of Jesus’s ignoble situation—to the exclusion of others. Many modern German Bibles still give Luther’s rendering, whereas others read, in a more direct rendering, “Siehe [i.e., in the imperative singular], der Mensch!” (“Look, the person/man!”). Some modern translations of the *St. John Passion* libretto, whether intentionally or unintentionally, sidestep the linguistic and interpretive challenges of Luther’s German text by providing a direct rendering of the Greek text, “Behold the man!”

¹⁰⁴Historical present tense in John but not Luther.

¹⁰⁵This reflects mockery on Pilate’s part, as he should know that the chief priests and attendants are not permitted to put Jesus to death on the charges brought against him. The leaders evidently understand Pilate not to be serious, for they continue pressing him for Jesus’s death.

¹⁰⁶In the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day, blasphemy is cited as a capital offense in Leviticus 24:16 (the meaning of whose Hebrew text is critically contested), “Welcher des HERRN Namen lästert, der soll des Todes sterben” (“Whoever blasphemes the name of the LORD, [it is] of death [that] he [this person] shall die”). In John 10:30 (the meaning of whose Greek text is critically contested) Jesus evidently makes himself out to be equal to God (the father), declaring “Ich und der Vater sind eins” (“I and [God] the father are one [i.e., in divine essence and in eternal nature, according to the contemporary Lutheran understanding of this verse]”), and in 10:33 “the Jews” are depicted as taking Jesus’s declaration to be blasphemy (i.e., against the majesty of the “one God” or “LORD alone” proclaimed in Deuteronomy 6:4).

¹⁰⁷Luther believed Pilate was afraid not that Jesus might be “the son” of the “one God” proclaimed by Jews, but rather that he was a potentially troublesome son of the pagan gods.

¹⁰⁸Historical present tense in John and Luther.

¹⁰⁹Historical present tense in John but not Luther.

kreuzigen, und Macht habe, dich loszugeben? Jesus antwortete: Du hättest keine Macht über mich, wenn sie dir nicht wäre von oben herab gegeben; darum, der mich dir überantwortet hat, der hats grössre Sünde. Von dem an trachtete Pilatus, wie er ihn losliesse.¹¹⁰

22. Durch dein Gefängnis, Gottes Sohn,
Muss uns die Freiheit kommen;
Dein Kerker ist der Gnadenthron,
Die Freistatt aller Frommen;
Denn gingst du nicht die Knechtschaft ein,
Müsst unsre Knechtschaft ewig sein.¹¹²

23. *Die Jüden aber schrieen und sprachen: Lässtest du diesen los, so bist du des Kaisers Freund nicht; denn wer sich zum Könige machet, der ist wider den Kaiser. Da Pilatus das Wort hörte, führte er Jesum heraus, und satzte¹¹⁵ sich auf den Richtstuhl, an der Stätte, die da heisset: Hochpflaster, auf Ebräisch aber: Gabbatha. Es war aber der Rüsttag in Ostern um die sechste Stunde,*

you?” Jesus answered: “You would have no power over me, if it were not given down to you from on high; therefore, the one who has handed me over to you, he has the greater sin.”¹¹¹ Upon this, Pilate sought how he might release him.

22. [It is] through your imprisonment,¹¹³ son of God, [that] Freedom [from sin] must¹¹⁴ come to us;
Your dungeon is the throne of grace,
The refuge of all the devout;
For had you not assumed [temporal] servitude,
Our servitude [to sin] would have had to be eternal.

23. *But the Jews shouted, declaring: “If you release this one, then you are not the emperor’s friend; for whoever makes himself king is against the emperor.” When Pilate heard this statement, he led Jesus out and set himself on the judgment seat,¹¹⁶ at the place that is called “High Pavement,” but “Gabbatha” in Hebrew.¹¹⁷ It was, however, the preparation day¹¹⁸ in [Jewish] Easter,¹¹⁹ at*

¹¹⁰John 19:2-12a.

¹¹¹That is, Pilate is to be considered sinful as well. Luther’s commentary states that Jesus does not excuse Pilate but shows Pilate’s own guilt. The “greater sin” presumably lies either with Caiaphas, who, technically, has turned him over to Pilate, or with Jesus’s disciple Judas. In fact, Luther suggests that the singular “der” (“the one”) may here be taken as a plural. The libretto of Bach’s *St. John Passion* further extends the levels of guilt to subsequent Christians (see especially movements 11 and 37).

¹¹²An aria text (i.e., not a hymn stanza), probably by Christian Heinrich Postel, that Bach set to the melody of the hymn “Machs mit mir, Gott, nach deiner Güt” in a typical simple harmonization. In Bach’s own *St. John Passion* materials, this movement is, nonetheless, headed “Choral” (“hymn”). In the 1728 printing of the libretto, this movement is headed “Choral. / Mel[odie]. Machs mit mir Gott nach deiner Güte. etc.” (“Hymn. Melody. Machs mit mir Gott nach deiner Güte. etc.”), and the text is given there in the boldface type reserved for hymns.

¹¹³“Gefängnis” is employed here not in its modern-German sense of “prison” but in its original, older-German sense as a synonym for “Gefangenschaft” (“imprisonment”); it is often used this way in the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day (e.g., Esra 1:11, Psalm 126:4). The state of being imprisoned (“Gefängnis”) is here contrasted with the state of being free (“Freiheit”); in the next lines the place where one is imprisoned (“Kerker”) is contrasted with the place where one is free (“Freistatt”).

¹¹⁴“Must” here in the sense of “it has to be this way” (i.e., because it is God’s will), not “it is intrinsically required to be this way.” Lutheran theologians would presumably have balked at reading these lines as saying “Jesus, by dint of your imprisonment, God is ‘required’ to grant us freedom.”

¹¹⁵“Satzte sich” is an older-German spelling for “setzte sich (“set/sat/installed himself”).

¹¹⁶Some Bibles understand John’s Greek to mean “and Jesus sat on the judgment seat,” thus picturing Jesus mocked by Pilate as a judge or king. Luther, however, clearly read the Greek to mean that Pilate was on the judgment seat: Luther Bibles employ the reflexive “Pilatus ... satzte sich” (“Pilate ‘set himself’ [or, ‘installed himself’; or simply, ‘sat’]), and Luther stressed that Pilate went there to make sure his judgment was completely open and in public.

¹¹⁷The name is actually Aramaic, not Hebrew.

¹¹⁸That is, the day when the Passover lambs were slaughtered in the Temple.

¹¹⁹By “Oster” (“Easter”) here, Luther’s translation relies on an understanding of “Passah” (Passover) as “das judische Osterfest” (“the Jewish Easter festival”), what was called in the English tradition, “Jewish Easter.” Thus the text can refer to “Easter” before the events of the Christian Easter have taken place.

*und er spricht zu den Jüden: Sehet, das ist euer König!
Sie schrieen aber: Weg, weg mit dem, kreuzige ihn!
Spricht Pilatus zu ihnen: Soll ich euren König kreuzigen?
Die Hohenpriester antworteten: Wir haben keinen König
denn den Kaiser. Da überantwortete er ihn,¹²⁰ dass er
gekreuziget würde. Sie nahmen aber Jesus und führeten
ihn hin. Und er trug sein Kreuz und ging hinaus zur
Stätte, die da heisset Schädelstätt; welche heisset auf
Ebräisch: Golgotha.¹²¹*

24. Eilt, ihr angefochtenen Seelen,
Geht aus euren Marterhöhlen,
Eilt—Wohin?—nach Golgotha!
Nehmet an des Glaubens Flügel,
Fliehet—Wohin?—zum Kreuzeshügel,
Eure Wohlfahrt blüht allda!

*the sixth hour,¹²² and he [Pilate] declares¹²³ to the Jews:
“Look, this is your king!” But they shouted: “Away, away
with him; crucify him!” Pilate declares¹²⁴ to them: “Shall I
crucify your king?” The chief priests answered: “We have
no king but the emperor.”¹²⁵ Then he handed him over, so
that he would be crucified. They took Jesus again and led
him away. And he carried his cross and went out to the
place that is called “Place of Skulls,” which in Hebrew¹²⁶
is called: “Golgotha.”*

24. Hurry, you besieged souls,
Leave your dens of [spiritual] torment,¹²⁷
Hurry—where to?—to Golgotha!
Accept faith’s wings;
Fly¹²⁸—where to?—to the cross’s hilltop;
Your welfare blossoms in that very place!¹²⁹

¹²⁰The 1728 printed libretto, reflecting the Greek text of John, here reads “überantwortete er ihn ihnen” (“handed him over to them [antecedent: ‘the chief priests’]”). The shorter text, i.e., without the words “to them,” in Bach’s setting (and which was the standard reading in Luther Bibles of Bach’s day and earlier, even though Luther’s particular source text, the 1519 edition of the New Testament by Erasmus, did contain the longer text, in both Greek and Latin readily allows for the (proper) understanding that Pilate turned Jesus over for the act of being crucified not to Jews but to Roman soldiers, the “they” who lead Jesus away (see also the “they” in movement 25); thus the text Bach set, without the phrase “to them,” does not suggest that it was “the Jews” who crucified Jesus.

¹²¹John 19:12b-17.

¹²²The “sixth hour” is at noon.

¹²³Historical present tense in John and Luther.

¹²⁴Historical present tense in John and Luther.

¹²⁵Listeners are presumably to understand the chief priests as saying “we have no Jewish king right now.” Jews had not been led to expect a messiah who acted like Jesus of Nazareth; in Jesus’s day, Jews had no human king of their own, and it would have been part and parcel of a chief priest’s framework of belief to hold that his only divine king was the one Almighty God, not a human/divine person associated or equated with God.

¹²⁶“Golgotha” is actually closer to the Aramaic than the Hebrew equivalent.

¹²⁷The poetry of this aria does not contain the egregiously anti-Jewish remarks found in its well-known source, the so-called *Brockes-Passion*, a leading eighteenth-century poetic rendering by Barthold Heinrich Brockes both of the passion narrative and meditations on it. The second line in Brockes is concerned not, as in Bach’s *St. John Passion*, with Christians leaving inner spiritual turmoil for the peace of the cross, but with Jews “leaving Achshaph’s dens of murder.” Achshaph (sometimes confused, in modern commentary on Brockes, with “Asaph,” a musician in the First Jerusalem Temple) was one of the many cities the Israelites, under Joshua, are depicted as having destroyed in their battles to take over the promised land of Canaan. “Leaving none that breathed” (Joshua 11:11), the Israelites burned Canaan’s cities to the ground, except for those that stood on Canaan’s hills (11:12-13). Brockes’s apparent moral: “Old Israel” should leave its murderous depths behind and fly to the hilltop of Calvary.

¹²⁸“Fliehen” would ordinarily mean “to flee,” and that rendering could reasonably work here, but more likely the word’s older-German alternate sense as a synonym for “fliegen” (“to fly”) is what was intended. The sense “to fly” places the emphasis on the end point, whereas the sense “to flee” places the emphasis on the starting point.

¹²⁹In older German, “allda” was an intensified form of “da” in its sense of identifying a location.

25. *Allda kreuzigten sie ihn, und mit ihm zween andere zu beiden Seiten, Jesum aber mitten inne. Pilatus aber schrieb eine Überschrift und satzte¹³⁰ sie auf das Kreuz, und war geschrieben: “Jesus von Nazareth, der Jüden König.” Diese Überschrift lasen viel Jüden, denn die Stätte war nahe bei der Stadt, da Jesus gekreuziget ist. Und es war geschrieben auf ebräische, griechische und lateinische Sprache. Da sprachen die Hohenpriester der Jüden zu Pilato: Schreibe nicht: der Jüden König, sondern dass er gesaget habe: Ich bin der Jüden König. Pilatus antwortet:¹³¹ Was ich geschrieben habe, das habe ich geschrieben.¹³²*

**26. In meines Herzens Grunde,
Dein Nam und Kreuz allein
Funkelt all Zeit und Stunde,
Drauf kann ich fröhlich sein.
Erschein mir in dem Bilde
Zu Trost in meiner Not,
Wie du, Herr Christ, so milde
Dich hast geblut zu Tod!¹³⁷**

25. *In that very place they¹³³ crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, but Jesus in the middle. But Pilate wrote [on a board the text for] a superscription and set it on the cross, and [it] was written, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.” Many Jews read this superscription, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city. And it was written in [the] Hebrew, Greek, and Latin language[s]. Then the chief priests of the Jews declared to Pilate: “Write not: ‘The King of the Jews’; rather, that ‘He said:¹³⁴ “I am the King of the Jews.””¹³⁵ Pilate answers:¹³⁶ “What I have written, that have I written.”*

**26. At the bottom of my heart,
Your name and cross alone
Blazes forth all times and seasons,¹³⁸
For which I can be joyous.
Appear to me in the image—
For consolation in my distress—
Of how you, Lord Christ, so copiously/generously¹³⁹
Have [for my salvation] bled yourself¹⁴⁰ to death.**

¹³⁰“Satzte” is an older-German spelling of “setzte” (“set”).

¹³¹The 1728 printed libretto here reads “antwortete” (“answered”).

¹³²John 19:18-22.

¹³³According to Luther, this “they” refers to the Roman soldiers. He notes that Pilate had not even commanded that Jesus should be crucified along with the two “murderers” but that the soldiers did this as a service to the malicious chief priests. See also the comment concerning the “they” in movement 27.

¹³⁴“Er gesaget habe” (rather than “gesagt hat” or “gesagt hätte”) is not perfect subjunctive but oblique expression (reported speech; old form).

¹³⁵The chief priests may have wished the many Jews visiting Jerusalem for Passover to see from the superscription that Jesus was dangerous to “the people” both politically (“king”—claiming power when in a province under Roman rule) and religiously (“I am”—in what is called its “absolute usage,” claiming divinity). Bibles that Bach owned do link Pilate’s superscription with the “I am” material in John 18:37 and 18:5.

¹³⁶Historical present tense in Luther but not John.

¹³⁷A stanza of “Valet will ich dir geben.”

¹³⁸“Zeit und Stunde” (literally, “time and hour”) was a common expression in older German, serving as the equivalent of the English expression “times and seasons” (e.g., Milton, *Paradise Regained*, “He [God] in whose hand all times and seasons roul”). The two nouns were meant to cover the senses of “quantitative time” (in Greek, “chronos”) and “qualitative time” (“kairos”).

¹³⁹The word “milde” in this context most likely means not “calmly” or “gently” but “copiously,” or “abundantly,” or “generously” (in older German, “milde” was often used as a synonym for “freigebig”). The word “milde” is apparently used in this same older-German sense in the aria “Können Tränen meiner Wangen” from Bach’s *St. Matthew Passion*. Compare also Psalm 37:21, as rendered in the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day, “Der Gottlose borget und bezahlet nicht; der Gerechte aber ist barmherzig und milde” (“The Godless one borrows and [re]pays not; the righteous one, however, is merciful and generous” [the underlying Hebrew, literally: “shows mercy and gives [generously]”).

¹⁴⁰The use of the reflexive rather than simple indicative with the verb “bluten” (“bleed”) is presumably meant to emphasize that Jesus actively bled on the cross, to give of himself—his bleeding was not passive, merely the inevitable result of his violent treatment.

27. Die Kriegsknechte aber, da sie Jesum gekreuziget hatten, nahmen seine Kleider und machten vier Teile, einem jeglichen Kriegesknechte sein Teil, dazu auch den Rock. Der Rock aber war ungenähet, von oben an gewürket¹⁴¹ durch und durch. Da sprachen sie untereinander:¹⁴² Lasset uns den nicht zerteilen, sondern darum losen, wes er sein soll. Auf dass erfüllet würde die Schrift, die da saget: "Sie haben meine Kleider unter sich geteilet und haben über meinen Rock das Los geworfen." Solches taten die Kriegesknechte. Es stund aber bei dem Kreuze Jesu seine Mutter und seiner Mutter Schwester, Maria, Kleophas Weib, und Maria Magdalena. Da nun Jesus seine Mutter sahe und den Jünger dabei stehen, den er lieb hatte, spricht er zu seiner Mutter: Weib, siehe, das ist dein Sohn! Darnach spricht er zu dem Jünger: Siehe, das ist deine Mutter!¹⁴³

**28. Er nahm alles wohl in acht
In der letzten Stunde,
Seine Mutter noch bedacht,
Setzt ihr ein Vormunde.
O Mensch, mache Richtigkeit,
Gott und Menschen liebe,
Stirb darauf ohn alles Leid,
Und dich nicht betrübe!**¹⁴⁷

27. The soldiers, however, when they [themselves] had crucified Jesus, took his clothes and made four parts, to each soldier his part, with these also the robe. But the robe was unseamed, woven from the top through and through. Then they declared to one another: "Let us not rend it apart, but toss for it, [to see] whose it shall be." So that the scripture would be fulfilled, which says: "They have parted my clothing among themselves and have cast lots for my robe."¹⁴⁴ Such a thing the soldiers did. But there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother and his mother's sister, Mary, Cleophas's wife, and Mary Magdalene. Now when Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he declares¹⁴⁵ to his mother: "Woman, look, this is your son." After that he declares¹⁴⁶ to the disciple: "Look, this is your mother."

**28. He took good heed of everything
In the final hour;
Considerate yet of his mother,
[He] sets her a guardian.
O humankind, put things straight,¹⁴⁸
Love God and humanity,
Die after that beyond all woe,
And do not sadden yourself.**¹⁴⁹

¹⁴¹"Gewürken" (or "gewürcken") is an older-German spelling of "gewirken" ("to knit," "to weave").

¹⁴²Although the narrative had just identified the group here as "die Kriegsknechte" ("the [Roman] soldiers"), the 1728 printed libretto inexplicably identifies the speakers of this line as "Juden" ("[The] Jews"). That "the soldiers" were not Jews is also evident from the fact that "the soldiers" later (in movement 21) mock Jesus inside the hall of judgment—"the Jews," according to John's narrative (movement 16), do not go in the hall of judgment so that they would not be ritually defiled.

¹⁴³John 19:23-27a.

¹⁴⁴Psalm 22:19 in the Luther Bibles of Bach's day.

¹⁴⁵Historical present tense in John and Luther.

¹⁴⁶Historical present tense in John and Luther.

¹⁴⁷A stanza of "Jesu Leiden, Pein und Tod."

¹⁴⁸"Richtigkeit machen" (literally, "to make correctness") was an older-German expression that meant not "make [for] righteousness" but "to put things straight (especially, e.g., to pay a debt)." This language was famously employed in Luther's rendering of Matthew 3:3, "Er ist der, von dem der Prophet Jesaias gesagt hat und gesprochen: Es ist eine Stimme eines Predigers in der Wüsten: Bereitet dem HERRN den Weg und macht richtig seine Steige!" ("He [Jesus] is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah has said, declaring: 'It is a voice of a preacher in the wilderness: "Prepare the way for the Lord and make his paths straight"").

¹⁴⁹This hymn line would readily have called to mind the consolations of Psalm 42:12 (repeated in 43:5), "Was betrübst du dich, meine Seele, und bist so unruhig in mir? Harre auf Gott; denn ich werde ihm noch danken, dass er meines Angesichtes Hilfe und mein Gott ist" ("Why do you sadden yourself, my soul, and why are you so restless within me? Wait for God; for I will yet thank him, because he is the help/salvation of my countenance, and my God").

29. Und von Stund an nahm sie der Jünger zu sich.
Darnach, als Jesus wusste, dass schon alles vollbracht
war, dass die Schrift erfüllet würde, spricht er: Mich
dürstet! Da stund ein Gefässe voll Essigs. Sie fülleten
aber einen Schwamm mit Essig und legten ihn um einen
Isopen, und hielten es ihm dar zum Munde. Da nun Jesus
den Essig genommen hatte, sprach er: Es ist
vollbracht!¹⁵⁰

30. Es ist vollbracht!
O Trost vor die gekränkten Seelen!
Die Trauernacht
Lässt nun die letzte Stunde zählen.
Der Held aus Juda siegt mit Macht
Und schliesst den Kampf.
Es ist vollbracht!

31. Und neiget¹⁵⁸ das Haupt und verschied.¹⁵⁹

29. And from [that] hour on, the disciple took her to his
own. After this, as Jesus knew that everything had already
been accomplished, [and, so] that the scripture¹⁵¹ would
be fulfilled, he declares:¹⁵² “I thirst!”¹⁵³ A vessel full of
vinegar was standing there. But they filled a sponge with
[the] vinegar, laid it upon a hyssop branch, and held it up
to his mouth. Now when Jesus had taken the vinegar, he
declared: “It is accomplished!”¹⁵⁴

30. It is accomplished!
O comfort for¹⁵⁵ the debilitated¹⁵⁶ souls!
The night of mourning
Now lets its final hour be counted.
The hero out of [the lineage of] Judah¹⁵⁷ triumphs with power
And brings the battle to a close.
It is accomplished!

31. And bowed his head and departed [earthly] life.

¹⁵⁰John 19:27b-30a.

¹⁵¹The passages that Lutheran theologians most often mentioned for this were Psalm 22, Psalm 42, or Job 15:16.

¹⁵²Historical present tense in John and Luther.

¹⁵³That is, “Mich dürstet [es]” (literally, “it thirsts me”; or “it is thirsting me”), an archaic impersonal expression for “Ich dürste” (“I thirst”; or, “I am thirsty”). Older English employed, as a corresponding impersonal expression, “me thirsteth” (“[it] thirsts me”), not unlike the now old-fashioned or regional impersonal verb “methinks” (“it seems to me”).

¹⁵⁴“Es ist vollbracht” is often rendered in English as “It is finished.” But Luther’s German is more emphatic than this, suggesting the stronger rendering “It is accomplished”; the declaration “Es ist vollbracht” connotes not simply “It [the earthly mission of Jesus] has been brought to its conclusion” but, more forcefully, “It has been brought to its fullness.”

¹⁵⁵As is the case at several other spots in the libretto, the old form “vor” appears where today’s German would use “für.”

¹⁵⁶The adjective “gekränkt” is apparently being used here in its older-German sense of “geschwächt” (“weakened”; or, “debilitated”).

¹⁵⁷The name “Held aus Juda” (“hero out of [the lineage of] Judah”) was a title given to Jesus in German Lutheran theology and hymnody, based on the belief that Jesus as God’s messiah was prophesied as a “hero” (Luther’s idiosyncratic rendering of the Hebrew word “shiloh”) in Genesis 49:10, a passage the meanings of whose Hebrew text is now unknown and much contested, and which in the German of the Luther Bibles in Bach’s day reads “Es wird das Scepter von Juda nicht entwendet werden ... bis dass der Held komme [or, in some Luther Bibles of Bach’s day, instead of the subjunctive, the indicative: ‘kommt’]” (“The scepter will not be taken away from [the lineage of] Judah ... until the [peace-instituting] hero come [or: ‘comes’]”).

¹⁵⁸The 1728 printed libretto here reads “Und er neiget” (“And he bowed”).

¹⁵⁹John 19:30b.

32. Mein teurer Heiland, lass dich fragen,
Da du nunmehr ans Kreuz geschlagen
Und selbst gesaget: Es ist vollbracht,
Bin ich vom¹⁶⁰ Sterben frei gemacht?
Kann ich durch deine Pein und Sterben
Das Himmelreich ererben?¹⁶¹
Ist aller Welt Erlösung da?
Du kannst vor Schmerzen zwar nichts sagen;
Doch neigest du das Haupt
Und sprichst stillschweigend: ja.

**Jesu, der du warest tot,
Lebest nun ohn Ende,
In der letzten Todesnot,
Nirgend mich hinwende
Als zu dir, der mich versüht,¹⁶²
O du lieber Herre!
Gib mir nur, was du verdient,
Mehr ich nicht begehre!¹⁶³**

32. My precious Savior, let [me] ask you:
Now that you [were] nailed to the cross¹⁶⁴
And [have] said yourself, “It is accomplished,”
Have I been made free from death?
Can I, through your pain and death,
Inherit the kingdom of heaven?
Is redemption of all the world [to be found] here?
You can, in agonies [of pain and death], it is true, say nothing;
But you bow your head
And declare silently, “Yes.”

**Jesus, you who were dead,
Now [you] live without end;¹⁶⁵
In the final throes of death,
[May I] turn myself nowhere
But to you, who reconciles me [with God, the father],
O you dear Lord!
Give me only what you have earned [for us];
More I do not ask for!**

¹⁶⁰The 1728 printed libretto here reads not “vom Sterben frei” (“free from death”; literally, “free from the death”) but “von Sterben frei” (“free from dying”).

¹⁶¹The 1728 printed libretto here reads “Kann ich durch deine Pein und Sterben nunmehr das Himmelreich ererben?” (“Can I through your pain and death now inherit the kingdom of heaven?”).

¹⁶²An older-German spelling of “versöhnt” (“reconciles”).

¹⁶³A stanza of “Jesu Leiden, Pein und Tod.”

¹⁶⁴This phrase is sometimes rendered not as “nailed to the cross” but as “slain on the cross” or “stricken on the cross.” Those renderings would, however, have required the dative “am [i.e., ‘an dem’] Kreuz” (“on the cross”) instead of (the accusative) “ans [i.e., ‘an das’] Kreuz” (“to the cross”). The accusative form of the phrase is employed in Luther’s rendering of Colossians 2:13-14, “Er hat uns geschenkt alle Sünde und ausgetilgt die Handschrift, ... und hat sie ... an das Kreuz geheftet” (“He [God/Jesus] has remitted us all sin and blotted out the promissory note and affixed it to the cross [where it is deluged with the redeeming blood of Jesus]”).

¹⁶⁵The full sense of these lines is derived from Revelation 1:17-18, “Ich bin der Erste und der Letzte, und der Lebendige; ich war tot, und siehe, ich bin lebendig von Ewigkeit zu Ewigkeit” (“I [the ‘one like a son of man,’ the resurrected Jesus] am the first [because from me come all things] and the last [because to me come all things], and the living one; I was dead, and look, I am alive [without end,] from eternity to eternity”).

33. Und siehe da, der Vorhang im Tempel zerriss¹⁶⁶ in zwei Stück von oben an bis unten aus. Und die Erde erbebete,¹⁶⁷ und die Felsen zerrissen,¹⁶⁸ und die Gräber täten sich auf, und stunden auf viele Leiber der Heiligen.¹⁶⁹

33. And look, there: the veil in the Temple split apart¹⁷⁰ wholly and utterly into two pieces, from top to bottom.¹⁷¹ And the earth quaked,¹⁷² and the rocks split apart,¹⁷³ and the graves opened,¹⁷⁴ and many bodies of the saints arose.¹⁷⁵

34. Mein Herz, indem die ganze Welt Bei Jesu Leiden gleichfalls leidet, Die Sonne sich in Trauer kleidet, Der Vorhang reisst, der Fels zerfällt, Die Erde bebt, die Gräber spalten,

34. My heart, while¹⁷⁶ the entire world With Jesus's suffering likewise suffers: The sun clothes itself in mourning, The veil tears apart, the rock crumbles, The earth quakes, the graves break asunder,

¹⁶⁶The 1728 printed libretto here reads “zerreiss” (“splits apart”; i.e., historical present tense).

¹⁶⁷In the 1728 printed libretto, the phrase “Und die Erde erbebete” (“And the earth quaked”) does not appear.

¹⁶⁸The 1728 printed libretto here reads not “Felsen zerrissen” (“rocks [did] split apart”; i.e., past tense) but “Felsen zerreißen” (“rocks [do] split apart”; i.e., in historical present tense).

¹⁶⁹Matthew 27:51-52b.

¹⁷⁰A Bible owned by Bach explains that this happened in order to indicate that Jesus, as God's high priest, would enter the Temple's Holy of Holies with his own blood and earn for his followers an everlasting redemption (i.e., and thus the Temple sacrifices would no longer be necessary).

¹⁷¹“Von oben an bis unten aus” (hyperliterally, “from above in until below out”) was a rare expression in Luther's day and also in Bach's day (likewise “von oben bis unten”). The standard expression was simply “von oben bis unten” (“from top to bottom,” which would be a more direct translation of the Greek in Matthew). By rendering not only with the “oben” versus “unten” but additionally with the “an” versus “aus,” Luther apparently meant to intensify and emphasize strongly the very thoroughness of the temple veil's being torn apart (“top-to-bottom,” “in-and-out [i.e., ‘out-and-out’]”).

¹⁷²There are many examples in the Hebrew Scriptures of the earth shaking as a sign of divine judgment of God's people or of the last times.

¹⁷³In the Calov Bible (a book owned by Bach), the seventeenth-century Lutheran theologian Abraham Calov says that the rocks were split apart as a sign of Godly wrath against the Jews. The Olearius Bible (also owned by Bach) provides similar commentary.

¹⁷⁴Using language from Ezekiel 37:12.

¹⁷⁵Lutheranism held that the true church of God had been established before the fall of Adam and Eve into sin and, further, that all messianic promises in the Hebrew Scriptures refer to Jesus of Nazareth. Thus, living by faith in God's promises, the saintly Israelites of the Hebrew Scriptures (but not later Jews) were considered to be part of the true church, “die Heiligen” (“the saints”), and could rise at this moment.

¹⁷⁶The German conjunction “indem” corresponds to the English conjunction “while” (i.e., “during the time that”) (“as/while”). In modern editions of the *St. John Passion* the German is sometimes given as two words, “Mein Herz, in dem die ganze Welt,” and this line is sometimes read as the preposition “in” (English, “in”) with the dative pronoun “dem” (“whom”), yielding the probably misconstrued sense “My heart, ‘in whom/which’ the entire world.” In some eighteenth-century manuscript sources for Bach's *St. John Passion*, the wording is indeed given as two words, but in older German, the conjunction “indem” was routinely spelled as either one word or as two. For example, in the Calov Bible, John 4:51 reads “Und in dem er hinab ging, begegneten ihm seine Knechte, ...und sprachen: ‘Dein Kind lebt’” (“And during the time that he [a royal official, whose son was deathly ill] was going down [from Cana, where Jesus was; home to Capernaum, where his son was], his servants met him ... and said: ‘Your child lives’”); the Olearius Bible here gives not “in dem” but “indem.” In the 1728 printing of the *St. John Passion* libretto, this expression is given in movement 34 unambiguously as one word, “indem.”

Weil sie den Schöpfer sehn erkalten,
Was willst du deines Ortes tun?

35. Zerfließe, mein Herze, in Fluten der Zähren
Dem Höchsten zu Ehren!
Erzähle der Welt und dem Himmel die Not:
Dein Jesus ist tot!

36. *Die Jüden aber, dieweil es der Rüsttag war, dass nicht die Leichname am Kreuze blieben den Sabbat über (denn desselbigen Sabbats Tag war sehr gross), baten sie Pilatum, dass ihre Beine gebrochen und sie abgenommen würden. Da kamen die Kriegsknechte und brachen dem ersten die Beine und dem andern, der mit ihm gekreuziget war. Als sie aber zu Jesu kamen, da sie sahen, dass er schon gestorben war, brachen sie ihm die Beine nicht; sondern der Kriegsknechte einer eröffnete seine Seite mit einem Speer, und alsobald ging Blut und Wasser heraus. Und der das¹⁸⁰ gesehen hat, der hat es bezeuget, und sein Zeugnis ist wahr, und derselbige weiss, dass er die Wahrheit saget, auf dass ihr gläubet. Denn solches ist geschehen, auf dass die Schrift erfüllet würde: "Ihr sollet ihm kein Bein zerbrechen." Und abermal spricht eine*

Because they see the creator [Jesus]¹⁷⁷ grow cold;¹⁷⁸
What will you [my heart] do for your part?¹⁷⁹

35. Dissolve, my heart, into floods of tears
To honor the Most High!
Report to the world and to heaven the distress:
Your Jesus is dead!

36. *But the Jews, because it was the preparation day,¹⁸¹ that the corpses might not remain on the cross during the sabbath (for that same sabbath day was highly solemn),¹⁸² asked Pilate that their legs would be broken,¹⁸³ and that they would be taken down. Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who had been crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus, because they saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs; rather, one of the soldiers opened his side with a spear, and immediately blood and water went out [of the side of Jesus's dead body].¹⁸⁴ And he who has seen this has given witness to it, and his witness is true, and this same one knows that he says the truth, so that you all may believe. For such a thing has taken place so that the scripture would be fulfilled: "You all shall¹⁸⁵ break apart*

¹⁷⁷In John 1, Jesus is called "the Word [of God] made flesh," "the Word" through whom "all things were made/created."

¹⁷⁸In older German, "erkalten" ("to wax cold") was sometimes used as a synonym for "sterben" ("to die"); here its use also accommodates a rhyme with "spalten" (here, "to break asunder"). The concern in this poem, apparently, is not that they "see" the body of Jesus getting colder before or after his dying, or both, but that they see him die.

¹⁷⁹"Deines Ortes" (literally, "of your place") is an older-German synonym for "deinerseits" ("for your part"). The sense of this line is not "What will you, my heart, do in the geographical/metaphorical place/spot where you are at present?" but "What will you, my heart, do for your part in all this mourning and shattering?"

¹⁸⁰The 1728 printed libretto here reads "der es gesehen hat" ("he who has seen it").

¹⁸¹That is, the day when the Passover lambs were slaughtered in the Temple.

¹⁸²In the biblical narrative of the institution of Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread (Exodus 12:1-29), it is said regarding the first day of the festival, in Luther's rendering (of 12:16a), "Der Tag soll heilig sein" ("The day shall be holy/solemn"). The original text of John 19:31 calls the sabbath day of its passion narrative a "great/solemn" day, and Luther ratchets this up to a "very/highly great/solemn" day. The supposition was that this particular sabbath was an especially great, solemn, and holy day because it was a sabbath that fell on the same day as the beginning of the festival. (There is, however, no known pre-John attestation of "great/holy/solemn" being employed to designate a sabbath that is also a festival day.)

¹⁸³That is, to hasten their deaths.

¹⁸⁴Luther (like many others) noted that blood and water cannot flow from dead bodies and, seeing forgiveness of sin written all over the narrated event, suggested (as did many others) that this was a miracle, pointing to the sacrament of communion and to the sacrament of baptism in the name of Jesus.

¹⁸⁵Here, "Ihr sollet" is not subjunctive but an old-fashioned spelling, employed frequently in the Luther Bibles of Bach's day, of the indicative conjugation that is otherwise spelled "Ihr sollt" ("you [plural] shall"). The 1728 printed libretto here reads "Ihr sollt."

*andere Schrift: "Sie werden sehen, in welchen sie gestochen haben."*¹⁸⁶

**37. O hilf, Christe, Gottes Sohn,
Durch dein bitter Leiden,
Dass wir dir stets untertan
All Untugend meiden,
Deinen Tod und sein Ursach
Fruchtbarlich bedenken,
Dafür, wiewohl arm und schwach,
Dir Dankopfer schenken!**¹⁸⁹

*no bone in it [the Easter lamb]."*¹⁸⁷ *And again another scripture declares: "They will look on whom they have pierced."*¹⁸⁸

**37. O help, Christ, son of God,
Through your bitter suffering,
That we, ever submissive to you,
May shun all iniquity,¹⁹⁰
[And may] consider your death and the reason
For it fruitfully;
In return, though [we be]¹⁹¹ poor and weak,
[May we] give you thank-offerings.¹⁹²**

¹⁸⁶John 19:31-37.

¹⁸⁷The scripture passage is Exodus 12:46, "Ihr sollt kein Bein an ihm zerbrechen" ("You all shall break apart no bone in it [‘the lamb’ selected for the Passover meal, as specified in 12:3]"), which means that John was citing Passover lamb imagery—note that in older German, "Passah" ("Passover") was defined as "das judische Osterfest" ("the Jewish Easter festival"), and in English, "Passover" was sometimes referred to as "Jewish Easter." The commentary in Bach's Bibles here at John 19:37 thus also cite 1 Corinthians 5:7, "Denn wir haben auch ein Osterlamm, das ist Christus, für uns geopfert" ("For we also have an Easter lamb; this is Christ, sacrificed for us"). Luther comments on the passage in John: "Er hat sollen das rechte Osterlamm sein, welches man ganz essen sollte" ("He has to be the proper Easter lamb, which should be eaten whole"). The libretto's "ihm" should be read as a neuter, not masculine, dative pronoun, referring to Jesus as the lamb rather than to Jesus by name.

¹⁸⁸The citation in John does not correspond exactly to the received Hebrew text or to the most common Septuagint reading of Zechariah 12:10.

¹⁸⁹A stanza of "Christus, der uns selig macht."

¹⁹⁰Reflecting biblical usage, "Untugend" is apparently used here to refer to violation of divine law. It was Luther's rendering of one of the corresponding senses of the term "adikia," defined as "sin against God," as it is used in the New Testament, e.g., in 1 John 1:9, "So wir aber unsere Sünde bekennen, so ist er treu und gerecht, dass er uns die Sünde vergibt und reiniget uns von aller Untugend" ("But if we confess our sin, then he [God] is faithful and just, so that he forgives us the sin and purifies us of all iniquity"). Sin against God is what this hymn stanza is pointing to in its next line: "Deinen Tod und sein Ursach fruchtbarlich bedenken" ("[May we] consider your [Jesus's] death and the reason for it [namely, to atone for humanity's sin]").

¹⁹¹Grammatically, the adjectives "arm und schwach" ("poor and weak") could modify either the "Dankopfer" ("thank-offerings") of line 8 or the "wir" ("we") of line 3. But semantically it seems more likely for these particular adjectives to apply to people than to offerings. For example, the adjectives "arm" or "arm und elend" ("poor and wretched") are frequently applied to people in the Luther Bibles of Bach's day but never to offerings, and Sirach 11:12, in the Luther Bibles of Bach's day, speaks specifically of "Mancher, der ist schwach und arm" ("Many a [person] who is weak and poor").

¹⁹²Biblically, a "thank-offering" was a particular kind of "peace-offering," i.e., a literal sacrifice on the altar, offered to God, in ancient Israel. Lutheranism used the term "Dankopfer" figuratively for Christian prayers and songs of thanksgiving, but the idiosyncratic rendering of Sirach 35:4 in the Luther Bibles of Bach's day is presumably also relevant here: "Wer Barmherzigkeit übet, das ist das rechte Dankopfer" ("Whoever practices mercy, this is the proper thank-offering").

38. Darnach bat Pilatum Joseph von Arimathia, der ein Jünger Jesu war¹⁹³ (doch heimlich, aus Furcht vor den Jüden), dass er möchte abnehmen den Leichnam Jesu. Und Pilatus erlaubete¹⁹⁴ es. Derowegen kam er und nahm den Leichnam Jesu herab. Es kam aber auch Nikodemus, der vormals bei der Nacht zu Jesu kommen war, und brachte Myrrhen und Aloen untereinander, bei hundert Pfunden. Da nahmen sie den Leichnam Jesu und bunden ihn in leinen Tücher mit Spezereien, wie die Jüden pflegen zu begraben. Es war aber an der Stätte, da er gekreuziget ward, ein Garte, und im Garten ein neu Grab, in welches niemand je geleyet war. Dasselbst hin legten sie Jesum, um des Rüsttags willen der Jüden, dieweil das Grab nahe war.¹⁹⁵

39. Ruht wohl, ihr heiligen Gebeine,
Die ich nun weiter nicht beweine,
Ruht wohl und bringt auch mich zur Ruh!
Das Grab, so euch bestimmt ist
Und ferner keine Not umschliesst,
Macht mir den Himmel auf und schliesst die Hölle zu.

38. After that, Joseph of Arimathea,¹⁹⁶ who was a disciple of Jesus (but secretly, for fear of the Jews),¹⁹⁷ asked of Pilate that he might take down Jesus's corpse. And Pilate allowed it. Therefore he came and took down Jesus's corpse.¹⁹⁸ But there came also Nicodemus, who formerly had come to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes,¹⁹⁹ about²⁰⁰ a hundred pounds.²⁰¹ Then they took Jesus's corpse and bound it in linen cloths with spices, the way the Jews are accustomed to burying. But there was by the place where he was crucified a garden, and in the garden a new grave, into which nobody had ever been laid. In that place they laid Jesus, for the sake of the preparation day of the Jews, because the grave was nearby.

39. Rest well, you saintly bones,²⁰²
Which I will no longer bewail;
Rest well and bring also me unto rest.
The grave—which is appointed to you
And from now on will enclose no distress—
Opens heaven unto me and closes hell.²⁰³

¹⁹³The 1728 printed libretto here reads not “der ein Jünger Jesu war” (“who was a disciple of Jesus”) but “der ein Jünger war” (“who was a disciple”).

¹⁹⁴The 1728 printed libretto here reads “Und Pilatus erlaubet es” (“And Pilate allows it”; i.e., in historical present tense).

¹⁹⁵John 19:38–42.

¹⁹⁶Some Bible lexicons of Bach's day give “der Löwe wird sterben” (“the lion will die”) as the meaning of the name “Arimathia”; and the Olearius Bible (which Bach owned) noted in its commentary on Mark 15:43, “Leo mortuus Domino, vel lux mortis Domini” (“the lion dead unto the Lord,” or “the light-of-the-Lord's death”). Revelation 5:5 speaks of God's messiah as “the lion from the tribe of Judah.”

¹⁹⁷John 9:22, “denn die Juden hatten sich schon vereinigt, so jemand ihn für Christum bekennte, dass derselbige in den Bann getan würde” (“for the Jews had already agreed, if anyone acknowledged himself for [Jesus as] Christ, that this person would be put under the ban”); and 16:2, “Sie werden euch in den Bann tun; es kömmt aber die Zeit, dass, wer euch tötet, wird meinen, er tue Gott einen Dienst daran” (“They [the Jews] will place you [followers of Jesus] under the ban; but the time is coming that whoever [of the Jews] kills you will suppose he thereby does God a service”). Bach set the latter passage, verbatim, in his church cantata “Sie werden euch in den Bann tun” BWV 44.

¹⁹⁸This sentence did not appear in the first two versions of the *St. John Passion*; it was apparently not regularly printed in the main text of Luther Bibles before the late 1720s. (It does not appear in the 1728 printed libretto.)

¹⁹⁹With echoes from the Hebrew Scriptures (Jeremiah 34:5; 2 Chronicles 16:14), the Gospel is describing an honorable burial for a regal figure, culminating the triumph of Jesus's glorifying crucifixion.

²⁰⁰“Bei,” here, is a synonym for “circa” (“about”).

²⁰¹Whether or not this “hundred pounds” is to be taken literally, and whether the units of measure underlying the word “pounds” specifies a heavy weight of precious spices or a high value in coinage for (a lighter amount) of these precious spices, this was in any event a superabundant quantity of myrrh and aloes, which seems to be the main point. Large numbers are used in John elsewhere as well, apparently to suggest messianic plenitude.

²⁰²“Heilige Gebeine” does not mean “relics” (i.e., in this case, any physical remains of a deceased holy/saintly person), a concept that would have been (unfavorably) associated with the Roman Catholic church.

²⁰³That is, “opens [the gates of] heaven unto me and closes [the gates of] hell.”

40. Ach Herr, lass dein lieb Engelein
Am letzten End die Seele mein
In Abrahams Schoss tragen,
Den Leib in seim Schlafkämmerlein
Gar sanft, ohn einge Qual und Pein
Ruhn bis am jüngsten Tage!
Alsdenn vom Tod erwecke mich,
Dass meine Augen sehen dich
In aller Freud, o Gottes Sohn,
Mein Heiland und Genadenthron!
Herr Jesu Christ, erhöre mich,
Ich will dich preisen ewiglich!²⁰⁴

40. Ah Lord, let your dear little angels²⁰⁵
At the very end carry my soul
Into Abraham's bosom [to heaven],²⁰⁶
My body resting in its little sleeping chamber [the grave]²⁰⁷
Altogether peaceably,²⁰⁸ without any sorrow and pain,
Until at the last day [the day of judgment].²⁰⁹
Raise me thereafter²¹⁰ from the dead,
So that my eyes will look on you
In all joy, O son of God,
My savior and throne of grace!
Lord Jesus Christ, do hear²¹¹ me [in these petitions];
I want to praise you eternally!

(transl. Michael Marissen and Daniel R. Melamed)



Scan or go to www.bachcantatatexts.org/BWV245.5 for an annotated translation

²⁰⁴A stanza of “Herzlich Lieb hab ich dich, o Herr.”

²⁰⁵The phrase “dein lieb Engelein” is more likely a poetically clipped version of the plural “deine lieben Engelein” than of the singular “dein liebes Engelein.” In Luke 16:19-31, the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, it says (at verse 22) that “der Arme starb und ward getragen von den Engeln in Abrahams Schoss” (“the pauper [Lazarus] died and was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom”).

²⁰⁶Western Christianity came to use “Abraham’s bosom” as a designation for heaven.

²⁰⁷The grave of the righteous person is spoken of as a “Kammer” (“chamber”) in Luther’s rendering of Isaiah 57:2, which in the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day reads “die richtig für sich gewandelt haben, kommen zum Frieden und ruhen in ihren Kammern” (“[those] who have properly walked forward [in the ways of Lord] come [through their death] to peace, and [they] rest in their chambers”). On this verse, the Calov Bible (which Bach owned) comments: “dass sie in ihren Gräbern ausruhen, als in ihren Schlafkämmerlein, bis der Zorn für übergehe, Es.XXVI.20, da sie werden aus ihren Gräbern auferwecket werden, und eingehen zum ewigen Leben, Dan.XII.1, Joh.V.29” (“that they take rest in their graves, as in their little sleeping chambers, until the wrath [of God] passes, Isaiah 26:20, when they will be resurrected from their graves, and enter into eternal life, Daniel 12:1, John 5:29”).

²⁰⁸The equivalent of the English expression “to die peaceably” was “Sanft in dem Herrn einschlafen” (literally, “gently/peaceably in the Lord to fall asleep”).

²⁰⁹“Der Jüngste Tag” (literally, “the youngest day”; i.e., “youngest” as “latest”) is Luther’s rendering of “the last day,” which is the term employed in the Gospel of John for the day of the divine judging of all persons at the end time. In the Gospel of Matthew this occasion is called “the day of judgment,” a term rendered by Luther as “das Jüngste Gericht” (literally, “the youngest judgment”).

²¹⁰“Alsdenn” is an older spelling of “alsdann” (“thereupon”), a synonym for “sodann” (“thereafter”).

²¹¹“Erhören” was an intensified form of “hören” (“to hear”), used in requests to royalty and in prayers to God. This heightened form is also employed, however, in other contexts; e.g., in John 9:32, “Von der Welt an ists nicht erhöret, dass jemand einem geborenen Blinden die Augen aufgetan habe” (“From [the creation of] the world on, it is absolutely not [to have been] heard [of] that anyone will have opened the eyes of a man born blind”).