



## The Gospel of John - Chapter Nineteen

- III [John 13:1-20:31 - The Farewell Discourse and the Passion Narrative \(continues\)](#)
- III.b [John 18:1-19:42 - Jesus' arrest, trials, death, and burial \(continues/concludes\)](#)
- III.b.vii [John 18:38b-19:16a - Jesus Sentenced to Death \(continues/concludes\)](#)

### Summary of Chapter Nineteen

This chapter continues the trial of Jesus before Pilate, although there is a marked change as Pilate has Jesus punished in order to try to placate the Jews even though he knew Jesus to be innocent. The dialogue with the crowd and then alone with Jesus continues, with Pilate wanting to secure Jesus' release but eventually bowing to the pressure from the Jews when he formally sentences Jesus to death.

John provides few details of the actual crucifixion, for its horrors were well known at the time he wrote the account. Jesus was taken out of the city to be crucified along with two criminals. The scene was witnessed by John and several women who had followed Jesus, including his mother. Jesus handed responsibility for the care of his mother over to John as he was dying on the Cross then finally surrendered his spirit to his Father.

In order to accelerate their deaths, as the Sabbath was approaching and the bodies were to be removed from the crosses, the guards broke the legs of the two criminals but they found Jesus to be already dead and did not break his legs. Instead, a soldier plunged his spear into Jesus' side. These actions, along with the sharing of Jesus' clothing, were all fulfilments of Scriptures concerning the death of the Messiah.

Two leading Jews, Joseph of Arimathæa and Nicodemus, openly announced their discipleship of Jesus by collecting his body, preparing it for burial and laying it in Joseph's new tomb. This, too, fulfilled the Scriptures.

<sup>1</sup> Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged.

### John 19:1

After the Jewish phase of the trial and the interrogation by Pilate, Jesus' sentencing begins. Regarding the appointment and service of Pilate as prefect for Judæa refer to 18:29.

Had him flogged. Jesus was beaten both before being sentenced and after being sentenced to death: <<*So he released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified*>> (Matthew 27:26), and: <<*So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified*>> (Mark 15:15). Some interpreters think this first beating is the same as the severe scourging that Jesus received in Matthew 27:26 and Mark 15:15. However, it seems unlikely that Pilate would have administered so violent and severe a punishment to someone who had not yet been condemned to death (v.16), and whom Pilate was still trying to release. It seems more likely, therefore, that this flogging was what the Romans called *fustigatio*, the lightest form of flogging administered for minor crimes. Thus John here and: <<*I will therefore have him flogged and release him*>> (Luke 23:16) use the verbs *mastigoō* and *paideuō* respectively to refer to this lighter flogging, whereas Matthew 27:26 and Mark 15:15 use a different word, *phragelloō* or scourged to refer to the much more severe beating that Jesus received after Pilate pronounced the sentence of death, the Roman *verberatio*, which was the most horrible kind of beating, administered in connection with capital punishments, including crucifixion.

Unlike the Romans, the Jews specified the maximum lashes a person could receive: <<*Forty lashes may be given but not more; if more lashes than these are given, your neighbour will be degraded in your sight*>> (Deuteronomy 25:3). That the Messiah would be flogged and abused was foreseen by Isaiah: <<*I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting*>> (Isaiah 50:6).

<sup>2</sup> And the soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and they dressed him in a purple robe.

### John 19:2

A crown of thorns represents a mock crown ridiculing Jesus' claim of being a king. The thorns would sink into the victim's skull, causing blood to gush out and distorting a person's face. This crown was most likely made from the date palm, the same plant that had supplied the fronds laid on Jesus' path as he entered Jerusalem a short time before (12:13). The spikes on this plant can reach twelve inches long and were notorious for inflicting pain.

When his son was returned to Abraham, God provided an alternative sacrifice to that of Isaac: <<*And Abraham looked up and saw a ram, caught in a thicket by its horns. Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt-offering instead of his son*>> (Genesis 22:13). Now God was offering up his son also caught up in the thorns of a thicket.

The purple robe, referred to also in: <<*And they clothed him in a purple cloak; and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on him*>> (Mark 15:17), similarly represents a mock royal robe. Purple is the imperial colour as noted in 1 Maccabees 8:14. The soldiers' actions are in stark, ironic contrast to the fact that Jesus truly is the King.

<sup>3</sup> They kept coming up to him, saying, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' and striking him on the face.

### John 19:3

They kept coming up to him indicates that the abuse was over a prolonged period of time, adding to the humiliation and the pain.

Hail, King of the Jews! mimics the 'Ave Cæsar!' or 'Hail, Cæsar!' extended to the Roman emperor. However, instead of kissing him respectfully the humiliation was compounded by striking him on the face, in a similar manner to his treatment by the authorities: <<*When he had said this, one of the police standing nearby struck Jesus on the face, saying, 'Is that how you answer the high priest?'*>> (John 18:22).

<sup>4</sup> Pilate went out again and said to them, 'Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no case against him.'

### John 19:4

Went out. Pilate continued to move between the internal parts of his headquarters, where he spoke privately to Jesus and the outside area where he met with the Jewish crowd.

Look, I am bringing him out to you. Pilate wanted to show them what a sorry sight this man now was having been flogged, wearing a crown of thorns and covered in blood. Not the fitting sight of a king and posing no threat to anyone, as v.5 indicates.

I find no case against him. Pilate repeats his initial verdict: <<*Pilate asked him, 'What is truth?' After he had said this, he went out to the Jews again and told them, 'I find no case against him'*>> (John 18:38). This is not a case of a not guilty verdict as might be found in a democratic court but a declaration of Jesus' innocence.

<sup>5</sup> So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, 'Here is the man!'

### John 19:5

Here is the man, Latin *Ecce homo*, probably conveys the sense, 'Look at the poor fellow!' In other words, 'What possible threat could this man pose to the government or to anyone else?' In his mock regal garments, Jesus must have been a heartrending sight. But in the context of John's Gospel, the statement may also highlight Jesus' identity as the one who is truly the perfect man, and in that case Pilate's words are recorded to show the irony of the situation. Ironically, this is the

statement made to the Jewish people when their very first human king was anointed: <<*When Samuel saw Saul, the Lord told him, ‘Here is the man of whom I spoke to you. He it is who shall rule over my people’*>> (1 Samuel 9:17), and is very similar to a reference to the Messiah: <<*say to him: Thus says the Lord of hosts: Here is a man whose name is Branch: for he shall branch out in his place, and he shall build the temple of the Lord*>> (Zechariah 6:12).

Traditionally the location of this event has been identified with the *Ecce Homo Arch*, which marks the traditional site for the Antonia Fortress on the Via Dolorosa in Jerusalem. However, most scholars believe the pavement in this locale to be later than the time of Jesus and the arch to be Hadrianic, i.e. 2<sup>nd</sup> Century AD.

<sup>6</sup> When the chief priests and the police saw him, they shouted, ‘Crucify him! Crucify him!’ Pilate said to them, ‘Take him yourselves and crucify him; I find no case against him.’

### John 19:6

The chief priests and the police may have been the ones orchestrating the crowds response here but Peter will later indicate that the people of Israel were equally culpable of this crime: <<*The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our ancestors has glorified his servant Jesus, whom you handed over and rejected in the presence of Pilate, though he had decided to release him*>> (Acts 3:13).

Crucify him! Crucify him! Crucifixion was widely practiced by the Romans, and the early Jewish historian Josephus mentions thousands of people crucified in 1<sup>st</sup> Century Palestine, mostly during rebellions against Rome. There are stories of Roman soldiers cruelly playing with different postures for crucified victims, e.g. Josephus, Jewish War 5.449-551, although the use of nails and a crossbar appear to have been common. Modern medical explanations for the cause of death on a cross have focused on either asphyxiation or shock. Crucifixion was widely believed to be the worst form of execution, due to the excruciating pain and public shame. Hanging suspended by one’s arms eventually caused great difficulty in breathing, which could be alleviated only by pushing up with one’s feet to take the weight off the arms. But that motion itself would cause severe pain in the feet, arms, legs and back, causing the exhausted victim to slump down again, only to be nearly unable to breathe once more. Eventually, the victim would succumb to suffocation, if he had not already died as a result of the cumulative effect of the physical trauma inflicted on him.

It seems hard to reconcile the fact that some in this crowd would have been those shouting something very different to Jesus less than a week earlier: <<*The next day the great crowd that had come to the festival heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, shouting, ‘Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord – the King of Israel!’*>> (John 12:12-13).

Take him yourselves. Pilate uses sarcasm, being fully aware that the Jews do not have the authority to impose the death penalty as commented on at John 18:31. They certainly could not fulfil his command to crucify him.

I find no case against him. Pilate confirms that he finds Jesus not guilty of any crime let alone the serious charge of insurrection that was alleged.

<sup>7</sup> The Jews answered him, ‘We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has claimed to be the Son of God.’

#### John 19:7

We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has claimed to be the Son of God. The Jews’ comment recalls Leviticus 24:16a: <<*One who blasphemes the name of the Lord shall be put to death*>>. Pilate and the Jewish leaders are very agitated, but the appeal they both make is to law. According to Roman law Jesus is innocent, as Pilate has now said three times. However, the leaders now assert that according to Jewish law Jesus must die because he claimed to be the Son of God. This was the charge that was brought against Jesus at the trial before Caiaphas: Matthew 26:63-66, Mark 14:61-64 and Luke 22:67-71, although this trial is not recorded by John.

<sup>8</sup> Now when Pilate heard this, he was more afraid than ever.

#### John 19:8

Pilate was more afraid than ever. This would have been because of the mention that Jesus was the Son of God (v.7), and because of his wife’s dream: <<*While he was sitting on the judgement seat, his wife sent word to him, ‘Have nothing to do with that innocent man, for today I have suffered a great deal because of a dream about him’*>> (Matthew 27:19). The discussion Pilate had just had with Jesus about his Kingdom now begins to make more sense to Pilate. He must now take Jesus back inside and explore this new dimension to his case.

<sup>9</sup> He entered his headquarters again and asked Jesus, ‘Where are you from?’ But Jesus gave him no answer.

#### John 19:9

Pilate entered his headquarters again to speak again with Jesus as he was getting nowhere with the Jews and starts to have some understanding that there is more to Jesus than he had first thought.

Where are you from? In their earlier discussion Jesus had said that his <<*kingdom is not from this world*>> (18:36a) and thus Pilate now wants to understand what he meant. In the context of the dialogue, Pilate is not asking for the country of his birth but wants to know if Jesus is human or divine. Jesus’ origins were frequently an issue in his dealings with his opponents (7:27-28, 8:14 and 9:29-30). For John, there are clear spiritual overtones to Pilate’s questions, refer to the summary comments on 18:28-38a.

But Jesus gave him no answer. Jesus' silence before Pilate is reminiscent of the depiction of the servant of the Lord: <<*He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth*>> (Isaiah 53:7). It amazed Pilate: <<*Pilate asked him again, 'Have you no answer? See how many charges they bring against you.' But Jesus made no further reply, so that Pilate was amazed*>> (Mark 15:4-5). Peter also alludes to this occurrence in his first epistle: <<*For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps. 'He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.' When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly*>> (1 Peter 2:21-23).

<sup>10</sup> Pilate therefore said to him, 'Do you refuse to speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you, and power to crucify you?'

<sup>11</sup> Jesus answered him, 'You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above; therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin.'

### John 19:10-11

Do you refuse to speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you, and power to crucify you? Pilate was exasperated by the lack of cooperation from the Jewish authorities and now he finds that Jesus is not helping him either. Therefore, he comes out with a threat, clearly hoping that Jesus would submit to this threat of death and seek his release by helping Pilate. The response must have struck Pilate like a physical blow and yet was probably spoken in all humility.

You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above. In normal circumstances Pilate might have taken this response to mean that Pilate's authority came from the emperor but given the claim that Jesus is the Son of God must have left Pilate in no doubt that he is referring to authority being given by God. This does not mean that the human agents of God's power, both Pilate and Caiaphas, are without sin but rather that there is an antinomy between divine sovereignty and human responsibility.

By stating power over me Jesus is making it quite clear that no one has authority or power over him other than the Father and anyone that the Father uses as his agent, in this case his allowing Pilate to have Jesus crucified. Paul will later show his understanding that God gives authority to all governing bodies: <<*Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God*>> (Romans 13:1).

In typical Jewish fashion, Jesus uses from above as a circumlocution for God. Jesus instructs Pilate that God rules over all, and that Pilate's authority is derived from God.

Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin. Pilate's fear is quite justified. He will be held accountable to God for how he exercises his

authority. His sin may not be as great as someone else's, but he is in fact still sinning. Furthermore, this indictment of Pilate implies something about Jesus' own identity and role, for he is claiming to know God and God's will. Indeed, Jesus himself is the point of reference for sin in that to reject him is sin (16:9) and to receive him is to obey God (6:29).

The one who handed me over to you probably refers to Caiaphas, the high priest. If Pilate sins by not administering justice to a man he knows is innocent, how much more sinful are the leaders of God's people who have received not merely the laws of justice but the divine law that bears witness to the Father and the one whom he has sent: <<*From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded*>> (Luke 12:48b).

Greater sin implies that there are also lesser sins: <<*If any of you sin without knowing it, doing any of the things that by the Lord's commandments ought not to be done, you have incurred guilt, and are subject to punishment*>> (Leviticus 5:17), <<*But whoever acts high-handedly, whether a native or an alien, affronts the Lord, and shall be cut off from among the people*>> (Numbers 15:30), and: <<*He said to me, 'Mortal, do you see what they are doing, the great abominations that the house of Israel are committing here, to drive me far from my sanctuary? Yet you will see still greater abominations'*>> (Ezekiel 8:6).

<sup>12</sup> From then on Pilate tried to release him, but the Jews cried out, 'If you release this man, you are no friend of the emperor. Everyone who claims to be a king sets himself against the emperor.'

### John 19:12

From then on Pilate tried to release him. Pilate clearly wanted to avoid any judgement that may come upon him for the sin that Jesus has just indicated he would be committing by condemning Jesus. He wanted to let him go but without antagonising the Jews.

Tried, Greek *ezetei*, is in the imperfect tense, signifying multiple attempts to secure Jesus' freedom. He finally sentenced him to die only after intense Jewish pressure, which he could resist no longer without causing a riot (vv.13-16).

If you release this man, you are no friend of the emperor. Friend here is likely a technical term suggesting that Pilate, in his role as an imperial prefect, was not responding as a good client to his patron.

Everyone who claims to be a king sets himself against the emperor. Throughout the Roman Empire it was the emperor who ruled supreme. In some cases, as with King Herod, puppet kings were given authority by the emperor to have some authority over their subjects but were themselves subject to Rome. Anyone who would proclaim themselves to be a king without such authority from Rome would be seen as a direct threat to the emperor and thus guilty of a capital crime. This was the claim of the Jews against Jesus: <<*They began to accuse him, saying, 'We found this man perverting our nation, forbidding us to pay taxes to the*

*emperor, and saying that he himself is the Messiah, a king'>> (Luke 23:2). Yet Jesus had taught quite openly that the Jews should: <<Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's>> (Mark 12:17b).*

<sup>13</sup> When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus outside and sat on the judge's bench at a place called The Stone Pavement, or in Hebrew Gabbatha.

### John 19:13

When Pilate heard these words. Pilate had a fear of divine retribution but he had a greater fear of being labelled an opponent of his imperial ruler. This was the most persuasive argument the Jews could have used and it proved effective.

The Greek for the judge's bench here, *bēma*, implies a raised area used for official judgments; also, the name Gabbatha plausibly indicates a 'raised place'. The *bēma* is the same word translated as tribunal where Paul was brought by the Jews in Corinth: <<*But when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him before the tribunal*>> (Acts 18:12). The exact locations of The Stone Pavement and the judge's bench, however, are uncertain, although they were clearly located in a public place for Pilate brought Jesus outside.

<sup>14</sup> Now it was the day of Preparation for the Passover; and it was about noon. He said to the Jews, 'Here is your King!'

### John 19:14

The day of Preparation of the Passover refers to the day preceding the Sabbath of Passover week: <<*The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate and said, 'Sir, we remember what that impostor said while he was still alive, "After three days I will rise again"'*>> (Matthew 27:62-63), <<*When evening had come, and since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath, Joseph of Arimathæa, a respected member of the council, who was also himself waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus*>> (Mark 15:42-43), and: <<*It was the day of Preparation, and the sabbath was beginning*>> (Luke 23:54). Thus all four canonical Gospels concur that Jesus' Last Supper was a Passover meal eaten on Thursday evening, by Jewish reckoning, the onset of Friday, the day of his crucifixion.

It was about noon or the sixth hour, but it is only an approximate statement since people did not keep precise time. Mark 15:25 has: <<*It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him*>> or 'the third hour' for the crucifixion, and various solutions have been proposed. The answer may simply be that the actual time was around 9:30-10:00 a.m. and John knew this, but his intention here was not to pinpoint the exact time but to note that it was nearing the time - 'about the middle of the day on the day of Preparation - when the Passover lambs would begin to be sacrificed in Jerusalem, thus highlighting a direct connection with

Jesus as: <<*the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*>> (John 1:29b).

Here is your King! Pilate's words again show the stark irony of the situation (v.5). Jesus is indeed their King, and here is their one last chance to receive him as such, but they will have nothing of it. Pilate thereby makes the moment of his decision the moment of decision for the Jews.

<sup>15</sup> They cried out, 'Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!' Pilate asked them, 'Shall I crucify your King?' The chief priests answered, 'We have no king but the emperor.'<sup>16a</sup> Then he handed him over to them to be crucified.

### John 19:15-16a

Away with him! Crucify him! As the Jews again reject Jesus and call for his immediate death, Pilate pushes them into a corner by reminding them of whose death they are calling for: Shall I crucify your King? Whether Pilate was incredulous and exasperated by their response or speaking in a mocking tone remains unclear but he helps to reinforce their crime.

Away with him means they wanted him to be put to death as also seen when Paul was arrested in Jerusalem many years later: <<*The crowd that followed kept shouting, 'Away with him!'*>> (Acts 21:36), and: <<*Up to this point they listened to him, but then they shouted, 'Away with such a fellow from the earth! For he should not be allowed to live'*>> (Acts 22:22).

We have no king but the emperor. By professing to acknowledge Cæsar alone as their king, the Jewish leaders betray their national heritage in which God himself is their ultimate King: <<*Gideon said to them, 'I will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you; the Lord will rule over you'*>> (Judges 8:23), and: <<*But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, 'Give us a king to govern us.' Samuel prayed to the Lord, and the Lord said to Samuel, 'Listen to the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them'*>> (1 Samuel 8:6-7), and deny their own messianic expectations based on the promises of Scripture. In fact, every year at this very feast of Passover they sang, 'From everlasting to everlasting you are God; beside you we have no king, redeemer, or saviour, no liberator, deliverer, provider, none who takes pity in every time of distress and trouble; we have no king but you'. It was not Jesus that was guilty of blasphemy but here it is the Jewish leaders and the crowd that had sided with them.

Then he handed him over to them to be crucified. Upon pronouncement of the sentence, the person was first scourged and then executed.

Pilate then hands Jesus over to them to be crucified. They themselves did not carry out the crucifixion, but this way of putting it completes the cycle of guilt. They had handed Jesus over to Pilate, and now he hands Jesus over to them. Both Jew and Gentile have rejected Jesus, and the way is now prepared for the ultimate revelation of the glory of God. This rejection of the Son of God is the essence of sin, and Jesus will now die to take away the sin of the world.

### III.b.viii John 19:16b-30 - The Crucifixion of Jesus

Jesus is led to the place of crucifixion and nailed to the Cross (vv.16-18). While his enemies continue to squabble with one another (vv.19-22), and divide his clothes (vv.23-24), Jesus himself continues to love his followers and directs their own sharing in his love (vv.25-27). Then he dies (vv.28-30). John's description of the actual crucifixion is amazingly brief. People in the ancient world would not need a description, since such executions were not rare and the barbarity of them was common knowledge.

Although crucifixion could take a variety of forms, it was most common to have the victim carry the crossbeam to the place of crucifixion where the upright was already in place. Occasionally the victim was tied to the crossbeam with leather thongs, but most often nails were used, as in the case of Jesus. The nails were five to seven inches long and were driven through the feet and wrists, not the hands.

Crosses in the shape of an X or a T were used, but since the title was attached over Jesus' head (Matthew 27:37), the style used for Jesus' Cross was known to be the shape usually imagined, a T, which was also a common form. The person was laid on the ground and nailed to the crosspiece, which was then hoisted into place.

Often the person was only a short distance off the ground, although the fact that a stick was needed in order to offer Jesus a drink (v.29) suggests his head was higher than arm's length above the people on the ground. The nail wounds would cause a great deal of bleeding, but death often took place through suffocation. A little seat rest was attached to allow the person to maintain a position in which it was possible to breathe, thus prolonging the agony.

<sup>16b</sup> So they took Jesus; <sup>17</sup> and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha.

#### John 19:16b-17

Jesus set out carrying the Cross by himself until he collapsed on the way, whereupon Simon of Cyrene was pressed into service: <<*As they went out, they came upon a man from Cyrene named Simon; they compelled this man to carry his cross*>> (Matthew 27:32). The account where Abraham was instructed by God to sacrifice his beloved son Isaac shows that the son two carried the wood that was to be used in his death too: <<*Abraham took the wood of the burnt-offering and laid it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together*>> (Genesis 22:6).

He went out is in keeping with the Jewish requirement that executions take place outside the camp or city: <<*Take the blasphemer outside the camp; and let all who were within hearing lay their hands on his head, and let the whole congregation stone him*>> (Leviticus 24:14), <<*Then the Lord said to Moses, 'The man shall be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him outside the camp'*>> (Numbers 15:35), <<*then you shall bring out to your gates that man or that woman who has committed this crime and you shall stone the man*>>

*or woman to death*>> (Deuteronomy 17:5), and: <<*Therefore Jesus also suffered outside the city gate in order to sanctify the people by his own blood*>> (Hebrews 13:12).

The Place of the Skull translates the Aramaic *Gulgulta* or *Golgotha*; the Latin equivalent used in the Vulgate is *calvaria*, hence Calvary. It may have been given this name because it was a place of execution, or because the area had a number of tombs, or possibly because the site in some way resembled a skull.



**The Preferred Location of Golgotha**

<sup>18</sup> There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them.

#### John 19:18

They crucified him. Jesus' crucifixion between two other criminals is reminiscent of: <<*For dogs are all around me; a company of evildoers encircles me*>> (Psalm 22:16a), and: <<*Therefore I will allot him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he poured out himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors*>> (Isaiah 53:12).

Jesus had taken a severe beating and would have been a dreadful sight to behold. This was reflected in the prophecy of God's suffering servant, which also shows his death would reveal his true glory: <<*See, my servant shall prosper; he shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high. Just as there were many who were astonished at him – so marred was his appearance, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of mortals – so he shall startle many nations; kings shall shut their mouths because of him; for that which had not been told them they shall see, and that which they had not heard they shall contemplate*>> (Isaiah 52:13-15).

<sup>19</sup> Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, 'Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.'

### John 19:19

The purpose of the inscription that was put on the Cross was to indicate a person's specific crime, presumably to deter others from committing similar acts. Here, though, it serves as a form of witness to Israel and indeed the world as to who it was that was being sacrificed for them.

The King of the Jews. Pilate's words again are true in a much more profound way than he or the Jewish people realised, which is another example of John's frequent use of double meaning and irony. By also including Jesus of Nazareth, Pilate inadvertently focuses on Jesus' humble humanity, while giving him the title of King speaks of his grandeur.

<sup>20</sup> Many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek.

### John 19:20

The place was near the city. Under Jewish law, those sentenced to die had to be taken outside of their camp or city walls. It was the same with the carcasses of animals used for sacrifice. Jesus was no exception: *<<For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp. Therefore Jesus also suffered outside the city gate in order to sanctify the people by his own blood>>* (Hebrews 13:11-12). However, they did not go far from the city and the crucifixion, in keeping with Roman tradition, would be held close to a main thoroughfare with people travelling to and from the city on a regular basis, thus many of the Jews read this inscription.

Aramaic was the language most widely understood by the Jewish population of Palestine and this is probably what is meant by Hebrew here; Latin was the official language of the Roman occupying forces; and Greek was the international language of the empire, understood by both Jews and Gentiles. The trilingual nature of the inscription thus ensured the widest possible awareness of the official reason why Jesus was being crucified.

<sup>21</sup> Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, 'Do not write, "The King of the Jews", but, "This man said, I am King of the Jews."'

<sup>22</sup> Pilate answered, 'What I have written I have written.'

### John 19:21-22

What I have written I have written. The chief priests were aggrieved at Pilate's precise description of Jesus and wanted him to change it to say that Jesus claimed this title and thus imply that it was a false claim, for no one's testimony is accepted without corroboration from other trustworthy witnesses: *<<Then the Pharisees said to him, 'You are testifying on your own behalf; your testimony is not valid'>>* (John 8:13). Here, Pilate becomes an unexpected witness to the Lordship of Jesus as the Christ of God.

<sup>23</sup> When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top.

### John 19:23

Similar to several later events related to the crucifixion in vv.28-37, the soldiers' actions fulfilled Scripture.

They took his clothes and divided them. Normally, those who were to be crucified were paraded naked through the streets to the place of execution. It seems that Jesus may have been at least partially clothed until he arrived at Golgotha, most likely in respect of Jewish sensitivity to nudity. However, the word for clothes is *chiton*, which was the undergarment worn against the skin and thus it seem that Jesus was naked on the Cross. Early church opinion on this is divided.

They divided them into four parts, one for each soldier as a bonus payment for the work the squad did in crucifying these men. This was common practice at crucifixions and having four soldiers for three convicted men also shows they expected no attempts to be made by the disciples to rescue Jesus.

The tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. The fact that it was seamless probably does not indicate that it was unusual or an item of luxury. John's focus on this feature has led many to find symbolism in this. The two main proposals for John's detail have been that it is a symbol either of Jesus as high priest, since the high priest's *chiton* was seamless, according to Josephus (Jewish Antiquities 3.161), or of the unity of the church, that is, the community as brought together by the death of Christ.

<sup>24</sup> So they said to one another, 'Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it.' This was to fulfil what the scripture says,

'They divided my clothes among themselves,  
and for my clothing they cast lots.'

<sup>25a</sup> And that is what the soldiers did.

### John 19:24-25a

John quotes Psalm 22:18, the psalm most frequently quoted in the NT, in which the psalmist David provides numerous prophetic details of the execution scene that is fulfilled in Jesus' crucifixion nearly 1,000 years later. This is the first of four references to Jesus as the righteous sufferer in keeping with the experience of the psalmist; v.28, v.36 and v.37 are the others.

By dividing Jesus' garments among them and by casting lots for his tunic, the Roman soldiers unwittingly fulfilled Scripture, continuing John's theme of Jesus' enemies unknowingly participating in God's plan of redemption. The soldiers' reasoning was that they did not want to tear Jesus' tunic, which was formed out of one piece of cloth.

John's account of Jesus' crucifixion reflects several details of Psalm 22:15-18, which mentions the sufferer's thirst (v.15), his 'pierced hands and feet' (v.16),

and his bones (v.17). This cluster of references strikes a strong note of prophetic fulfilment.

Psalms 22 is a psalm of King David in his role as a righteous sufferer. The title above Jesus' head is proclaiming him to be King of the Jews, and John sees Jesus as replicating a pattern of the greatest king in Israel's past. Thus, this reference is not a gratuitous proof text, but a link with a type. Fulfilment of Scripture, in this sense, is the replication of a pattern, and Jesus is the ultimate fulfilment, the centre of all the patterns.

<sup>25b</sup> Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.

### John 19:25b

The women are reported as standing near the Cross here whereas elsewhere the account is slightly different: <<*There were also women looking on from a distance; among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome*>> (Mark 15:40). The distance from the Cross is not the issue but the fact that they stayed with Jesus and were eyewitnesses to his crucifixion and death.

On Jesus' mother, refer to vv.26-27 as well as her involvement with the first miracle of turning water into wine in 2:1-5.

His mother's sister may be Salome, the mother of the sons of Zebedee mentioned in Matthew and Mark. Thus James and John were the cousins of Jesus just as John the Baptist was, although they had not known him in that capacity.

Mary the wife of Clopas is likely to be the 'other Mary' mentioned by Matthew as being at the tomb to help dress Jesus' body and was therefore a witness of both Jesus' death and resurrection.

Mary Magdalene had had seven demons driven out of her by Jesus in Galilee (Luke 8:2) and had followed him ever since. Mary was called Magdalene because she was from Magdala, a city on the western shore of Galilee identified with modern Migdal.

<sup>26</sup> When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, 'Woman, here is your son.' <sup>27</sup> Then he said to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

### John 19:26-27

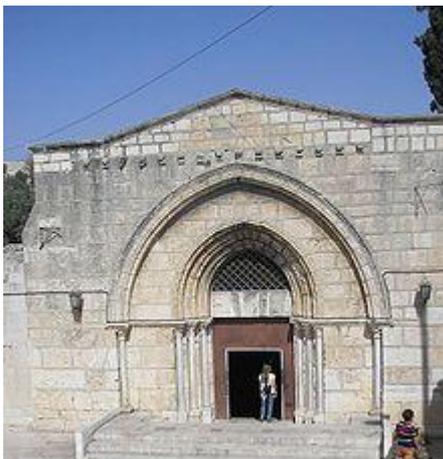
Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her. John does not mention himself by name in his Gospel but is again inferred here. In keeping with his writing style he does not name Jesus' mother or Jesus' aunt, John's own mother.

He said to his mother, 'Woman, here is your son.' In keeping with biblical injunctions to honour one's parents: <<*Honour your father and your mother, so*

***that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you>>*** (Exodus 20:12), Jesus made provision for his mother, who was almost certainly widowed, since Joseph is not mentioned in the Gospels during Jesus' ministry, and probably in her late 40s, with little or no personal income.

Jesus' address for his mother, Woman as in 2:4, is an expression of polite distance. Jesus in no way shows disrespect for his mother or questions her authority, for that would be contrary to his Father's Law.

Here is your mother. John already had a mother in Salome but the instruction here is that John should take on the responsibility of caring for Mary's needs for the rest of her life, despite the fact that she still had living sons of her own. Jesus, as the eldest son, was making legal provision for his mother in the way that he believed to be the best. Tradition has it that Mary moved to Ephesus with John at the start of the Jewish-Roman War in AD66 and died there some years later. However, Eastern Christianity and Roman Catholics believe that she returned to Jerusalem and died there, with her tomb being located in Gethsemane. Whichever account is true what is known is that John complied with Jesus' instruction: And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.



12<sup>th</sup> Century façade of Mary's Tomb



House of Mary in Ephesus

<sup>28</sup> After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfil the scripture), 'I am thirsty.' <sup>29</sup> A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth.

### John 19:28-29

In order to fulfil the scripture. The reference to Scripture being fulfilled builds on v.24. It is not that he was consciously thinking of texts and doing things to echo them, but rather that Scripture reveals God's will and Jesus perfectly accomplishes God's will.

Because Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said 'I am thirsty'. This is most likely in allusion to Psalm 69:21b, another passage featuring King David as the righteous sufferer, thus bearing witness to Jesus' identity: **<<for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink>>**. However, it can also refer to Jesus' spiritual thirst and desire to do his Father's will to the very end: **<<Am I not to drink the cup**

*that the Father has given me?>>* (John 18:11b). Jesus came to form a community that can share in his own relationship with the Father. This he had done.

The sour wine Jesus is offered here was used by soldiers to quench their thirst and is different from the <<*wine mixed with myrrh*>> (Mark 15:23b), a sedative that Jesus was offered and refused on his way to the Cross.

Hyssop was a plant classified in 1 Kings 4:33 as a simple shrub that could grow from the crack of a wall. It was used for the sprinkling of blood on the doorposts at the original Passover: <<*Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and touch the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood in the basin. None of you shall go outside the door of your house until morning*>> (Exodus 12:22), and later in purification rites, summed up in: <<*Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow*>> (Psalm 51:7).

<sup>30</sup> When Jesus had received the wine, he said, 'It is finished.' Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

### John 19:30

Jesus received the sour wine, probably to moisten his parched throat in order to be able to proclaim a loud cry of triumph at the end of his suffering.

It is finished proclaims that all the work the Father had sent him to accomplish was now completed, particularly his work of bearing the penalty for sins. This means there was no more penalty left to be paid for sins, for all Jesus' suffering was finished: <<*But when Christ came as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation), he entered once for all into the Holy Place, not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption*>> (Hebrews 9:11-12).

The term gave up, which emphasises the voluntary nature of Jesus' self-sacrifice, echoes the description of the death of the suffering servant in Isaiah 53:12. The order of Jesus' actions is important. John does not say that Jesus died and then his head slumped over, but rather that he bowed his head, an attitude of submission, and then gave up his spirit.

His spirit does not mean the Holy Spirit but Jesus' own human spirit, which he voluntarily released from his body that it might return to the presence of God the Father: <<*Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, 'Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.'* Having said this, he breathed his last>> (Luke 23:46). His spirit would remain in heaven with the Father until it returned to his body at his resurrection on the first day of the week (John 20:1).

It is accepted that Jesus was on the Cross for about six hours before he died, which is less than it took for some people to die. However, no one else had to bear God's wrath and the crushing burden of mankind's sin. John also does not record the continued mocking of the opponents and even the two robbers crucified alongside him. In many ways, death was a release, but death would ultimately have to succumb to the power of God as well.

### III.b.ix John 19:31-37 - Jesus' Side Is Pierced

John finds the events immediately following Jesus' death to be highly significant. He begins with Pilate and the Jewish opponents (v.31), then the soldiers (vv.32-37) and finally Jesus' friends (vv.38-42). This is the same sequence he followed in the previous section (vv.19-27).

The opponents are still trying to discredit Jesus even after his death; the soldiers unwittingly produce a witness to Jesus through their actions. The striking new feature is the witness of Jesus himself. The way in which he died was a witness to the truth about himself, but now, even after he has died, his body produces a witness both to the truth about his identity and to the truth about what his death has accomplished (vv.34-37).

<sup>31</sup> Since it was the day of Preparation, the Jews did not want the bodies left on the cross during the sabbath, especially because that sabbath was a day of great solemnity. So they asked Pilate to have the legs of the crucified men broken and the bodies removed.

#### John 19:31

It was the day of Preparation, confirming that Jesus died on the day before the Passover Sabbath, that is, on the Friday.

That Sabbath was a day of great solemnity, i.e. a high day or a special Sabbath, because it was the Sabbath of Passover week.

The Jews did not want the bodies left on the cross during the sabbath. So they asked Pilate to have the legs of the crucified men broken and the bodies removed. The Jews' request was based on the instruction of Deuteronomy 21:22-23, something put into practise in Joshua 8:29, according to which bodies of hanged criminals were not to defile the land by remaining on a tree overnight.

To have the legs of the crucified men broken. The Romans typically left decaying bodies on crosses long after death. However, on certain ceremonial occasions, such as the emperor's birthday (Philo, Against Flaccus 83), they could take the bodies down early, and breaking the legs would facilitate a quick death by preventing a person from prolonging his life by pushing himself up with his legs to be able to breathe. Arm strength soon failed, and asphyxiation ensued. In 1968 building contractors excavated bones of a crucified man named Jehohanan from Givat ha-Mivtar in northern East Jerusalem, whose legs had been broken, thus providing confirmation of this practice.

<sup>32</sup> Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who had been crucified with him. <sup>33</sup> But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs.

#### John 19:32-33

The soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who had been crucified with him, perhaps working in toward Jesus from the two sides. When they came to Jesus they found him already dead and therefore did not break his

legs. In this way, although the opponents attempted to further discredit Jesus, they unwittingly bear witness to what he has accomplished. Jesus has drunk the cup of God's wrath and indeed has become accursed. But as the Lamb of God, Jesus has taken away the sin of the world. The opponents' attempt to have Jesus' legs broken actually draws attention to the fact that they were not broken.

<sup>34</sup> Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out.

#### John 19:34

One of the soldiers pierced his side. Although Jesus was found to be dead, the soldier wanted to make absolutely sure. The flow of blood and water indicates the heart chamber was emptied with the blood flowing out along with pericardial fluid. What John is indicating is that Jesus truly died as a fully human being with a genuine human body: <<*This is the one who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one that testifies, for the Spirit is the truth. There are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood, and these three agree*>> (1 John 5:6-8).

The fact that water symbolises purification, the Spirit and the new birth provides a connection with baptism. The fact that blood symbolises the sacrificial death of Christ, which gives life to the world, provides a connection with the taking of Communion.

The spear, Latin *hasta*, was about 6 feet or 1.8 m in length and was made up of an iron point or spearhead joined to a shaft of light wood, such as ash.

<sup>35</sup> (He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth.)

#### John 19:35

He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. John, like Jesus in 17:1-3, refers to himself in the third person, which increases rather than diminishes the argument that his testimony is true. By doing so, John reinforces the validity of what he has recorded. He has been an eyewitness to the work and teaching of Jesus, and also stood at the foot of the Cross as Jesus was executed. He would also be a witness to the Risen Christ and his ascension into heaven.

He knows that he tells the truth. John was called as a witness to Jesus' ministry and is thus compelled to tell the truth of what he has seen and heard. Jesus confirmed their role in one of his final appearances to the disciples: <<*You are witnesses of these things*>> (Luke 24:48).

<sup>36</sup> These things occurred so that the scripture might be fulfilled, 'None of his bones shall be broken.'

### John 19:36

None of his bones shall be broken is taken from Psalm 34:20, where David is portrayed as the righteous sufferer. This is now the third scriptural proof cited by John to indicate that Jesus' death fulfils Scripture. Jesus escaped the breaking of his legs, and the spear piercing his body likewise failed to break any bones. It is a clear reference to the role of Jesus as the Paschal Lamb of God, sacrificed for this final Passover: <<*It shall be eaten in one house; you shall not take any of the animal outside the house, and you shall not break any of its bones*>> (Exodus 12:46), reiterated in Numbers 9:12. The body of Jesus continues to bear witness to his identity and his accomplishment even after he has died.

<sup>37</sup> And again another passage of scripture says, 'They will look on the one whom they have pierced.'

### John 19:37

They will look on the one whom they have pierced. The second of two texts fulfilled by the Roman soldiers' actions in v.34 is Zechariah 12:10, which is also alluded to in: <<*Look! He is coming with the clouds; every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail*>> (Revelation 1:7). Isaiah also prophesied this in the death of the Suffering Servant: <<*But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed*>> (Isaiah 53:5 NIV).

### III.b.x John 19:38-42 - The Burial of Jesus

Two prominent men, Joseph and Nicodemus, were permitted to take the body of Jesus from the Cross, prepare it in the prescribed manner for an honourable burial and laid him to rest in Joseph's own rock cut tomb.

<sup>38</sup> After these things, Joseph of Arimathæa, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body.

### John 19:38

Joseph of Arimathæa, a wealthy member of the Jewish ruling council according to Matthew 27:57, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus, fulfilling another Scripture: <<*They made his grave with the wicked and his tomb with the rich*>> (Isaiah 53:9a).

The location of Arimathæa has not been conclusively determined although Eusebius, in his 4<sup>th</sup> Century list of place names, believed it was identical to Ramah or Ramathaim-Zophim. Ramah was the birthplace of Samuel: <<*They rose early in the morning and worshipped before the Lord; then they went back to their house at Ramah. Elkanah knew his wife Hannah, and the Lord remembered her*>> (1 Samuel 1:19).

He is one of two men mentioned in this brief account who had not been publically associated as disciples of Jesus before. Thus John writes of him that he was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews.

It is unlikely that Pilate would have released Jesus' body so soon to either a family member or to one of the disciples who were known to be close to Jesus. The secrecy surrounding Joseph and his prominence in the community as member of the Sanhedrin were the likely reasons why Pilate gave him permission to remove his body from the Cross.

<sup>39</sup> Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. <sup>40</sup> They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews.

### John 19:39-40

Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night is a reference to the meeting recorded in John 3:1-21. He was also a prominent leader in Israel and had come at night probably in order to avoid detection, although he did later offer a legal defence of Jesus' situation: <<*Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus before, and who was one of them, asked, 'Our law does not judge people without first giving them a hearing to find out what they are doing, does it?'*>> (John 7:50-51). He, along with Joseph, had obviously come to a realisation of who Jesus was through his trials and passion and were now determined to make a public show of their allegiance to him.

Nicodemus came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. John's account of the burial continues to develop the theme of Jesus' royal identity. The large amount of spice used obviously expresses their love for Jesus, as had the extravagance of Mary's gesture earlier (12:3). Such excessive amounts of spice were a feature of at least some royal funerals: <<*They buried him in the tomb that he had hewn out for himself in the city of David. They laid him on a bier that had been filled with various kinds of spices prepared by the perfumer's art; and they made a very great fire in his honour*>> (2 Chronicles 16:14).

They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. Despite being crucified as a criminal and shunned by the Jewish authorities, these two leaders made sure that Jesus was accorded the appropriate honour that his heritage allowed him. The action taken by Joseph and Nicodemus signals a change in their own discipleship as they clearly break with the rest of the Jewish leadership. By handling the body they have made themselves ritually unclean and are thus disqualified from participating in the rest of the festival.

<sup>41</sup> Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid.

## John 19:41

A garden points to an elaborate structure; a gardener is mentioned in 20:15. It was clearly located very close to the place where he was crucified (v.17).

The two main locations, where Jesus is thought to have been buried are the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, to the west of the temple and the Garden Tomb, north of the ancient city. Both would have been outside the 1<sup>st</sup> Century city walls. Early church tradition favours the Holy Sepulchre site, as the area around the Garden Tomb consists largely of Iron Age or OT-era tombs. The Holy Sepulchre Church originally dated from the time of Constantine and was dedicated in AD335, although the present structure is largely medieval.



The Church of the Holy Sepulchre



The Garden Tomb

A new tomb in which no one had ever been laid refers to Joseph's own tomb that he would have had prepared for his own death at some future point. This was common practice amongst wealthy families in that era and, since he was not from Jerusalem, he would have no tomb in the city. That John highlights it as a new tomb offers several possibilities:

1. Kings were buried in new tombs.
2. Jesus could not come into contact with corruption in his tomb if it were empty.
3. There could be no doubt of the significance of his resurrection when the empty tomb was discovered.

**John's account is very similar to that reported by Luke in his Gospel: <<Now there was a good and righteous man named Joseph, who, though a member of the council, had not agreed to their plan and action. He came from the Jewish town of Arimathæa, and he was waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then he took it down, wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid it in a rock-hewn tomb where no one had ever been laid>> (Luke 23:50-53).**

The main options for Judæan burial included shallow trench graves; sarcophagi, which were coffin-like stone boxes, rarely used above ground; and rock-cut tombs, such as the one described here.

Rock-cut tombs were much more expensive than trench graves, since they required extensive excavation into existing or manufactured caves. They are thought to have generally belonged to single, extended families. Therefore this tomb would most probably have been intended to be used as Joseph of Arimathæa's family tomb.



A Rock-cut Tomb

Rock-cut tombs would have rolling stone doors, mainly to protect the body from wild animals, and inside burials would occur in loculi, i.e. beds cut into rock or arcosolia that are beds cut sideways into the rock like ledges with an arched top. Sarcophagi and wooden coffins were also occasionally used in the tombs. After a body had decayed, its bones were removed to allow reuse of the loculus or arcosolium. These bones could be piled elsewhere in the tomb or reinterred in a specially designed box called an ossuary, which held one or more bodies.

<sup>42</sup> And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

#### John 19:42

Regarding the Jewish day of Preparation refer to the comments made on v.14. The Sabbath was rapidly approaching, when all work must cease, including that of carrying spices or transporting a corpse. It may have been that the preparations of Jesus' body were not as complete as they might have been, leading to the women coming to tend to the body on the Sunday (20:1). The use of a rich man's tomb fulfils Isaiah 53:9, as noted in comments made on v.38.

**This is the end of Good Friday. Jesus is dead and buried in his tomb. I recommend that this is a good time to listen to Candi Pearson singing Amazing Love with imagery by Mel Gibson from the Passion of Christ that can be located on the home page of the web site.**