



## The Gospel of Matthew - Chapter Twenty Seven

XIV. Matthew 26:1-27:66 - The Crucified Messiah  
(continues/concludes)

XIV.e Matthew 26:57-27:10 - The Jewish trial of Jesus  
(continues/concludes)

### Summary of Chapter Twenty Seven

Following his trial before the Sanhedrin during the night, Jesus was brought once more before a fuller meeting to have their decision ratified before he was led off to face the Roman governor for his verdict.

Filled with remorse, Judas went back to the chief priests and elders who had hired him to confess his sins but they would show no interest in his desolate state. He threw his fee back at them, went away and hanged himself.

Jesus was questioned by Pilate but mostly remained silent, not answering the false accusations that were made against him, something that made Pilate marvel, for both men knew what the outcome would be.

Pilate always believed Jesus to be the innocent victim of the priest's jealousy and so he invoked a tradition that he thought would secure the release of Jesus. He offered the people a choice of a prisoner that he would release to them at the Passover. The choice was between a convicted murderer and insurrectionist named Barabbas and Jesus. To the dismay of Pilate, and clearly prompted by the chief priests, the people called for the release of Barabbas and the crucifixion of Jesus.

In an attempt to remove himself from any blame for this innocent man's death, Pilate publicly washed his hands of Jesus' blood and the crowd subsequently accepted responsibility upon themselves and their future generations, so intent were they on seeing Jesus die that day. Pilate then had Jesus scourged.

The Roman soldiers took Jesus inside the Roman headquarters, calling many other soldiers to join in the mockery and abuse of Jesus, dressing him as a king in a scarlet robe, placing a crown of thorns on his head and bowing before him, only to hit him and spit in his face. They then led him out to be crucified.

Jesus was crucified outside the city walls at a place called Golgotha. Having been stripped naked, the Roman soldiers cast lots for his clothing. Two criminals were crucified with Jesus, one on either side. The chief priests, passersby and even the criminals continued to mock Jesus on the Cross. All of this fulfilled the Scriptures about the death of the Messiah.

After about six hours on the Cross, three of them in utter darkness in the middle of the day, Jesus cried out one final time, apparently forsaken by God, yet his was not a cry of forsakenness but a cry of victory, for he had completed the Father's will. A great earthquake shook the whole region, tearing the rocks apart and causing the dead saints to rise from their graves. At the same time the temple curtain was torn in two, signifying a way to reconciliation between God and his creation. The Roman centurion guarding Jesus came to realise that Jesus was indeed the Son of God.

A rich disciple called Joseph, a member of the ruling council, went to Pilate to request Jesus' body to be released to him for burial. This was granted and the body prepared for the grave, then it was placed in Joseph's own new rock-cut tomb nearby, and a rock rolled in front of it. The women, who had come with Jesus from Galilee, witnessed both the crucifixion and the burial.

The following day, which was the Sabbath, the chief priests and elders went to Pilate to ask for a Roman guard for the tomb to prevent the disciples from stealing Jesus' body and pretending that he had risen from death as he had foretold. Pilate agreed they could use soldiers drawn from the Roman temple guard for the task and instructed them to do all they could to have the tomb well guarded. The chief priests went with the soldiers to the tomb and sealed the stone in place.

#### XIV.e.iii Matthew 27:1-2 - Jesus Brought before Pilate

A second and fuller gathering of the Sanhedrin met together to confirm the death sentence passed during the night on Jesus. He was then led away to the Roman governor Pilate, who was the only one who could give legal mandate for the execution of Jesus.

<sup>1</sup> When morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people conferred together against Jesus in order to bring about his death.

#### Matthew 27:1

When morning came on Friday, daylight would be around 06:00, all the chief priests and elders of the people assembled so that they could give a more formal ratification of the earlier pronouncements against Jesus during the early morning hours, as recorded in Matthew 26:57-68. Thus, despite the earlier meeting being quorate, this meeting would give their findings the appearance of greater legitimacy.

It is clear that there were some dissenting voices among the full assembly, probably including Nicodemus, who would help to bury Jesus, and certainly Joseph had objected: *<<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>> (Luke 23:50-51).*

<sup>2</sup> They bound him, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate the governor.

#### Matthew 27:2

They bound him. Jesus had been bound when he was first arrested: <<*So the soldiers, their officer, and the Jewish police arrested Jesus and bound him*>> (John 18:12). Either they had untied him while he was on trial but still guarded or they had done so while he was kept imprisoned in the pit overnight, for he would have needed to have his hands free in order to hold on to the rope that would have been used to lower him in and pull him out.

Handed him over to Pilate, just as Jesus had said: <<*For he will be handed over to the Gentiles; and he will be mocked and insulted and spat upon*>> (Luke 18:32). Pilate was the governor of Judæa and Roman prefect under Emperor Tiberius. To maintain ultimate control, the Romans kept the death penalty under their own jurisdiction and reserved the right to intervene in any case. The Roman historian Tacitus records Christ's execution as being 'in the reign of Tiberius, by sentence of the procurator Pontius Pilatus' (Annals 15.44, which was published between AD115-AD120). Refer to comments made in Luke 3:1 for confirmation of the political situation in Judæa during the time of Jesus.

*Jesus had come as the Saviour of both the Jews and the Gentiles. It was only right that both had the chance to condemn him as well as to embrace him.*

#### XIV.e.iv Matthew 27:3-10 - The Suicide of Judas

These leaders were willing to pay out blood money for Jesus' capture, willing to allow Judas' suicide, but too pious to accept their own blood money into the temple treasury.

Jewish law prescribed for false witnesses the penalty they had wished to inflict on others; since the chief priests refused to serve the cause of justice, Judas had to see to his own execution. Although Roman society regarded suicide as an honourable and noble way to die, all readers should recognise Judas' act as one of despair and desperation; a dishonourable but very sad and lonely death.

While Judas left the temple to perform the deed, the leaders' blatant unconcern for justice or for Judas' life contrasts starkly with their attention to purity in details. By sentencing Judas to take care of his own guilt, they had unconsciously sentenced themselves before God.

<sup>3</sup> When Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he repented and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders. <sup>4</sup> He said, 'I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.' But they said, 'What is that to us? See to it yourself.'

#### Matthew 27:3-4

Jesus was condemned. The reality of what he had done came to Judas. Jesus was not going to be released and Judas' treachery would cost an innocent man his life. Perhaps Judas had just hoped to make a quick profit without it coming to this.

Judas' feelings of remorse and his attempt to return the blood money, the thirty pieces of silver that the chief priests had paid him for betraying Jesus: <<*Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, 'What will you give me if I betray him to you?' They paid him thirty pieces of silver. And from that moment he began to look for an opportunity to betray him*>> (Matthew 26:14-16), are recorded only by Matthew.

He repented is the Greek word *metamelomai* and is best translated changed his mind. Judas experienced feelings of regret and remorse, but this is less than repentance, Greek *metanoia*, which means a change of heart or attitude towards God. His guilt was more to do with the outcome of his betrayal rather than recognition of who Jesus really is.

It has to be the hope of all true Christians throughout history that Judas' repentance was indeed heartfelt and accepted, thus bringing him back into saving grace. However, Jesus had said to him: <<*The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born*>> (Matthew 26:24), thus indicating otherwise.

I have sinned by betraying innocent blood. Judas clearly realised the error of his ways but confessed to the priests and not to God. Their response was nothing short of callous, showing total disregard for this man's wellbeing, his status in God's eyes, or indeed his confession of Jesus' innocence, for they simply said, 'What is that to us?'

<sup>5</sup> Throwing down the pieces of silver in the temple, he departed; and he went and hanged himself.

#### Matthew 27:5

Throwing down the pieces of silver. That which had tasted sweet had turned sour inside him: <<*So I went to the angel and told him to give me the little scroll; and he said to me, 'Take it, and eat; it will be bitter to your stomach, but sweet as honey in your mouth'*>> (Revelation 10:9), bringing to mind the words of the Lord's brother: <<*Your gold and silver have rusted, and their rust will be evidence against you, and it will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure for the last days*>> (James 5:3), or perhaps: <<*They swallow down riches and vomit them up again; God casts them out of their bellies*>> (Job 20:15). It could certainly be said of Judas that: <<*For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains*>> (1 Timothy 6:10). Judas could not have wandered any further if he had tried to!

Showing no sign of true repentance, i.e. asking for God's forgiveness for his gross sin that would have saved him even at this late stage, Judas hanged himself rather than face his crushing guilt. The account: <<*Now this man acquired a field with the reward of his wickedness; and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out. This became known to all the residents of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their language Hakeldama, that is, Field of Blood*>> (Acts 1:18-19), is complementary, not contradictory. Refer to comments made on Acts 1:17-18 and Acts 1:19-20 for a comparison of these two accounts, the comments made by Peter at that time and the Scriptures that are associated with the demise of the betrayer.

There are some who believe Judas committed an even worse sin by not appealing to the mercy of God than he did by betraying Christ. Whatever viewpoint one takes, he was certainly a person to be pitied and one in desperate need of Christian compassion.

<sup>6</sup> But the chief priests, taking the pieces of silver, said, 'It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since they are blood money.'

#### Matthew 27:6

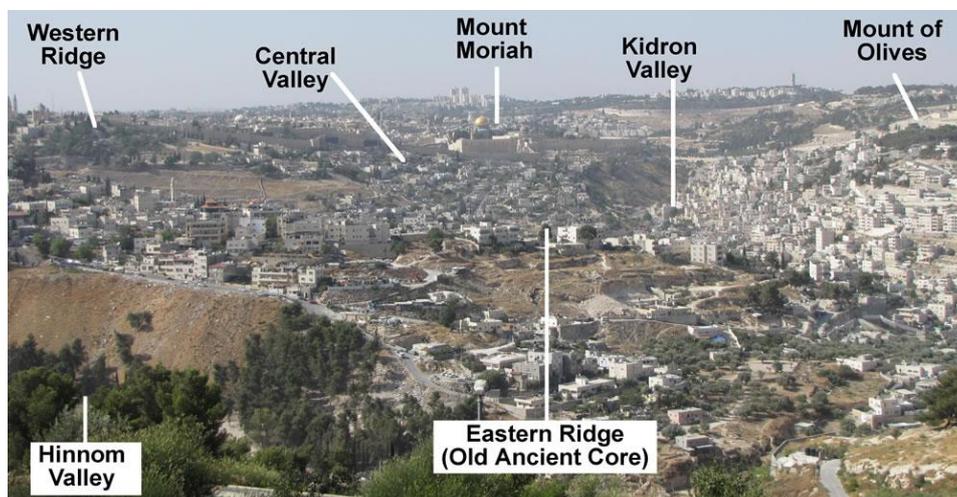
It was known as **blood money** as Judas had accepted it in return for handing Jesus over to the authorities, knowing this could lead to Jesus' death, even if he hoped it would not. Such money could not be returned into the house of God as it was believed to be covered by the same principles as: <<*You shall not bring the fee of a prostitute or the wages of a male prostitute into the house of the Lord your God in payment for any vow, for both of these are abhorrent to the Lord your God*>> (Deuteronomy 23:18).

It is ironic that money could be taken from the temple treasury, which was considered to be God's money, to pay for the betrayal of God's only Son, and yet it could not be returned into the treasury after the deed was done in way of restitution for the crime. The only restitution for crime, or indeed any sin, is the Cross, and the only contribution anyone else can make is genuine repentance and a display of love to God, in response to the love he has shown to everyone else: <<*In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins*>> (1 John 4:10).

<sup>7</sup> After conferring together, they used them to buy the potter's field as a place to bury foreigners. <sup>8</sup> For this reason that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day.

#### Matthew 27:7-8

The name **Field of Blood** arose from its association with the violent death of Judas, as noted in Acts 1:18-19, and perhaps also with the 'blood money' of v.6 paid for his betrayal of Jesus. Most church traditions from at least the 4<sup>th</sup> Century place this in the Hinnom Valley, south of Jerusalem, although it is difficult to confirm the precise location.



The topography indicates the location of the Hinnom Valley south of the city

The Hinnom Valley had long since been identified as providing an image of hell for it was where the rubbish from the city and its surrounding villages was burned; and its fires never went out.

<sup>9</sup> Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah, ‘And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of the one on whom a price had been set, on whom some of the people of Israel had set a price, <sup>10</sup> and they gave them for the potter’s field, as the Lord commanded me.’

#### Matthew 27:9-10

The prophet Jeremiah. While drawing on a combination of words from Jeremiah 19:1-13 and Zechariah 11:11-13, Matthew attributes the prophecy to Jeremiah as the more prominent prophet. In the same way, Mark combines quotations from Isaiah and Malachi but cites only Isaiah as the more prominent prophet: <<*As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, ‘See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way’*>> (Mark 1:2), which is taken from Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 3:1.

Since the significant part of the quoted prophecy is from Zechariah and that the Syriac manuscripts omit the name Jeremiah, there are some that believe a scribe has added the prophet Jeremiah here in error. This would cause no doctrinal issue if this were the case.

#### XIV.f Matthew 27:11-26 - The Roman trial of Jesus

The Jewish religious leaders lacked the final authority to impose the death penalty, and the charge of blasphemy was insufficient for a death sentence under Roman rule. So Jesus was sent to the Roman governor Pilate for trial, charged with sedition against Roman governance.

This account is not so much about Jesus being on trial but the character of Pilate, who would find no evidence against Jesus, received divine warning via his wife’s dream of Jesus’ innocence, and yet would give way to the pressure of the people and hand an innocent man over to them for death. It is a clear demonstration that political expediency took precedence over justice. Yet it is not just Pilate that was to blame, it was the Jewish leadership and the generation that blindly followed them, despite welcoming Jesus as their Messiah just a few days earlier.

#### XIV.f.i Matthew 27:11-14 - Pilate Questions Jesus

Matthew’s record of Jesus’ appearance before the Roman governor is brief but serves to indicate that Pilate found no evidence to support the political charges of sedition brought against Jesus and should have had him released as a free man.

<sup>11</sup> Now Jesus stood before the governor; and the governor asked him, ‘Are you the King of the Jews?’ Jesus said, ‘You say so.’

#### Matthew 27:11

The governor was Pontius Pilate, who was Prefect of Judæa between AD26-36. Pontius Pilate’s title was traditionally thought to have been procurator, since Tacitus speaks of him as such. However, an inscription on a limestone block known as the Pilate Stone, a dedication to Tiberius Cæsar Augustus, that was discovered

Matthew27-6

in 1961 in the ruins of an amphitheatre at Cæsarea Maritima, refers to Pilate as 'Prefect of Judæa'.

King of the Jews. Since blasphemy was not sufficient to warrant the death penalty under Roman rule, the Jewish leaders restated the charges when they handed Jesus over to Pilate: <<*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). Such a claim to kingship would be a direct challenge to Cæsar and therefore punishable by crucifixion.

You say so is the same wording used in: <<*Judas, who betrayed him, said, 'Surely not I, Rabbi?' He replied, 'You have said so'*>> (Matthew 26:25), and it is a Greek expression that deflects responsibility back upon the one asking a question, as it does in Matthew 26:64 in Jesus' dialogue with the high priest at his first trial.

<sup>12</sup> But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he did not answer. <sup>13</sup> Then Pilate said to him, 'Do you not hear how many accusations they make against you?' <sup>14</sup> But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed.

#### Matthew 27:12-14

He did not answer, he gave him no answer. Jesus had sufficiently answered Pilate's original question in v.11, and there was nothing more to say that would change Pilate's mind. Jesus was again fulfilling the messianic prophecy: <<*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), just as he had done during his first trial before the chief priests and elders in Matthew 26:63.

Pilate was greatly amazed at Jesus' refusal to defend himself, not understanding of course that it was the will of God that he should be executed in this way. Under Roman law it was generally accepted that a defendant was guilty if he remained silent under questioning but equally the law was required to give him at least three opportunities to respond to the charges laid against him.

#### XIV.f.ii Matthew 27:15-23 - Barabbas or Jesus?

Pilate had set up a custom to release a prisoner as a gesture to the Jewish population in order to help maintain social order during the Passover festival. He clearly thought that he could have Jesus set free by offering the people either a man who seemed harmless or the dangerous murderer Barabbas. He was greatly surprised and dismayed when the people, prompted by the Jewish leadership, called for Barabbas to be freed and Jesus to be condemned.

<sup>15</sup> Now at the festival the governor was accustomed to release a prisoner for the crowd, anyone whom they wanted. <sup>16</sup> At that time they had a notorious prisoner, called Jesus Barabbas. <sup>17</sup> So after they had gathered, Pilate said to them, 'Whom do you want me to release for you, Jesus Barabbas or Jesus who is called the Messiah?' <sup>18</sup> For he realised that it was out of jealousy that they had handed him over.

## Matthew 27:15-18

Release a prisoner for the crowd. Pilate had apparently instituted a custom as a means of winning favour with the masses. It would also have helped to reduce any tensions that may have led to mob violence that occurred during such festivals, for the Jews were very volatile especially as they remembered the Passover was a celebration of their national freedom from slavery in Egypt and now they were in slavery to the Romans in what had once been their own land.

Jesus Barabbas was a notorious criminal who had committed robbery, insurrection and murder: <<*Now a man called Barabbas was in prison with the rebels who had committed murder during the insurrection*>> (Mark 15:7), and: <<*Then they all shouted out together, 'Away with this fellow! Release Barabbas for us!' (This was a man who had been put in prison for an insurrection that had taken place in the city, and for murder)*>> (Luke 23:18-19). He may have belonged to one of the rural guerrilla bands that victimised the wealthy upper class of Israel as well as the Romans and were therefore popular with the common people. Barabbas, Greek *bar-abbas* means 'son of the father'. Ironically, the people wanted Barabbas released rather than the true Son of the Father, Jesus.

Out of jealousy. Pilate knew the high priest and the Sanhedrin were not concerned about threats to Roman rule; rather, they are envious of Jesus' popularity and felt threatened by his authoritative ministry.

<sup>19</sup> 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 judgement seat was traditionally used to show that any verdict passed was lawful and legally binding, removing the possibility of any mistake being made if the judge commented on a case away from the judgement seat as to what he thought should be done. What Pilate would not have known was that he would be the one to stand before Christ when the time for true judgement comes: <<*For all of us must appear before the judgement seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for what has been done in the body, whether good or evil*>> (2 Corinthians 5:10).

I have suffered a great deal because of a dream about him. Romans often viewed dreams as omens. The dream was probably given to Pilate's wife by God as a sign of Jesus' innocence. What his wife suffered in her dream is not revealed, although it was not a new phenomenon in relation to dreams given to people by God, such as the forecast of severe famines to come: <<*In the morning his spirit was troubled; so he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt and all its wise men. Pharaoh told them his dreams, but there was no one who could interpret them to Pharaoh*>> (Genesis 41:8), as well as: <<*In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls on mortals, while they slumber on their beds, then he opens their ears, and terrifies them with warnings*>> (Job 33:15-16), <<*In the second year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, Nebuchadnezzar dreamed such dreams that his spirit was troubled and his sleep left him*>> (Daniel 2:1), and: <<*I saw a dream that frightened me; my fantasies in bed and the visions of my head terrified me*>> (Daniel 4:5).

<sup>20</sup> Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus killed. <sup>21</sup> The governor again said to them, 'Which of the two do you want me to release for you?' And they said, 'Barabbas.' <sup>22</sup> Pilate said to them, 'Then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?' All of them said, 'Let him be crucified!' <sup>23</sup> Then he asked, 'Why, what evil has he done?' But they shouted all the more, 'Let him be crucified!'

### Matthew 27:20-23

The chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas. These men were supposed to be selected for their wisdom and their sense of justice in the sight of God. What would Moses have made of such men? Especially as he once wrote of them: <<*If a judicial decision is too difficult for you to make between one kind of bloodshed and another, one kind of legal right and another, or one kind of assault and another – any such matters of dispute in your towns – then you shall immediately go up to the place that the Lord your God will choose, where you shall consult with the levitical priests and the judge who is in office in those days; they shall announce to you the decision in the case*>> (Deuteronomy 17:8-9).

Which of the two do you want me to release for you? Pilate could and should have used his own authority to ensure justice was done, setting the innocent man free and punishing the one proven guilty. Yet, in order to avoid any personal controversy, he would let the people decide, no doubt fully expecting them to make the right choice. He must have been dismayed when they said, Barabbas.

What is on display here is two types of leadership. A weak response by Pilate, when people expect their leaders to be decisive; a corrupt response by the Jews, who put their own desires and needs ahead of those of whom they are placed in leadership to serve.

Why, what evil has he done? Pilate was clearly bemused by their response, yet his own does no credit to anyone for neither he nor those calling for the death of Jesus could find any justifiable reason and yet neither side had the courage to do what was right and just.

A few days earlier the people of Jerusalem had shouted 'Hosanna!' during Jesus' Triumphal Entry into the city; now they were crying 'Let him be crucified!' A few months later Peter would charge the people with their offence: <<*But you rejected the Holy and Righteous One and asked to have a murderer given to you*>> (Acts 3:14).

### XIV.f.iii Matthew 27:24-26 - Pilate Hands Jesus over to Be Crucified

Pilate realised that it would be politically expedient to hand Jesus over to the mob rather than risk a riot. However, he wanted to distance himself from the decision, perhaps because he knew also of the popular support Jesus had with some of the people, and he claimed himself to be innocent of the killing.

The Jewish people, in typical cultural fashion, then took responsibility for Jesus' blood on their own heads and those of their children, something many would live to regret when God justifiably judged Jerusalem in AD70. Thus Pilate had Jesus scourged and handed over for crucifixion.

<sup>24</sup> So when Pilate saw that he could do nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took some water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, 'I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves.'

#### Matthew 27:24

Washed his hands before the crowd was not an attempt to purge himself of sin but a public demonstration that he had found no reasonable grounds for giving Jesus the death penalty. The people would have readily recognised this symbolic act from their own law: <<*All the elders of that town nearest the body shall wash their hands over the heifer whose neck was broken in the wadi, and they shall declare: 'Our hands did not shed this blood, nor were we witnesses to it'*>> (Deuteronomy 21:6-7).

I am innocent of this man's blood may have been his viewpoint; although God, no doubt, would have seen it differently: <<*Woe to those who make unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive decrees*>> (Isaiah 10:1 NIV). Following his time in Judæa, Pilate vanished into historical obscurity. Jesus' disciples clearly did not accept that either party involved was in any way innocent of Jesus' death, although they acknowledged that their actions were foreknown by God: <<*For in this city, in fact, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place*>> (Acts 4:27-28).

<sup>25</sup> Then the people as a whole answered, 'His blood be on us and on our children!'

#### Matthew 27:25

The people, Greek *laos*, is Matthew's normal term for Israel as a nation.

His blood be on us was a common idiom denoting culpability for someone's death, and was used by Paul when the Jews in Corinth would not accept the Gospel: <<*When they opposed and reviled him, in protest he shook the dust from his clothes and said to them, 'Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles'*>> (Acts 18:6). The people placed the responsibility for Jesus' crucifixion directly on themselves and their children, and they were judged with the destruction of Jerusalem in AD70. In the reverse of normal Kingdom principles of 2 Corinthians 1:20; it was they who made the promise and God who said 'Amen'.

However, future generations should not be held responsible for the sins of their ancestors, for that would be unjust, contrary to the statutes of God: <<*Parents shall not be put to death for their children, nor shall children be put to death for their parents; only for their own crimes may persons be put to death*>> (Deuteronomy 24:16), and: <<*In those days they shall no longer say: 'The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge.' But all shall die for their own sins; the teeth of everyone who eats sour grapes shall be set on edge*>> (Jeremiah 31:29-30).

<sup>26</sup> So he released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.

## Matthew 27:26

So he released Barabbas thus bringing to mind the words of King Solomon: <<*The wicked is a ransom for the righteous, and the faithless for the upright*>> (Proverbs 21:18).

After flogging Jesus refers to the Roman scourging and was a dreadfully cruel punishment. This was again a fulfilment of Scripture: <<*Those who plough ploughed on my back; they made their furrows long*>> (Psalm 129:3), although it should always be remembered that: <<*upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed*>> (Isaiah 53:5b), as well as what was still to come: <<*and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross*>> (Colossians 1:20).

A more in-depth look at Roman flogging shows it was an horrifically cruel punishment. Those condemned to it were tied to a post and beaten with a leather whip that was interwoven with pieces of bone and metal, which tore through skin and tissue often exposing bones and intestines. In many cases, the flogging itself was fatal. The Romans scourged Jesus nearly to death so that he would not remain alive on the Cross after sundown.

Jesus was beaten both before being sentenced and after being sentenced to death. Some interpreters think the first beating is the same as the severe scourging that Jesus received here, that is also recorded in 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, and whom Pilate was still trying to release. It seems more likely, therefore, that the earlier flogging recorded by Luke and John was what the Romans called fustigation, the lightest form of flogging administered for minor crimes. Thus John 19:1 and Luke 23:16 use the verbs *mastigoō* and *paideuō* respectively to refer to this lighter flogging, whereas Matthew here 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* was the most horrible kind of beating and was only administered in connection with capital punishments including crucifixion. It would often be the cause of death, negating the need to crucify the prisoner, although they were sometimes nailed to the cross after death and put on public display as a deterrent to others.

## XIV.g Matthew 27:27-44 - Jesus the Messiah crucified

Matthew now takes readers to the very heart of his Gospel: the fulfilment of OT prophecies about the suffering servant in Isaiah 42:1-4 and Isaiah 52:13-53:12, and Jesus' own predictions about his death given to his disciples in Matthew 16:21, 17:22-23, 20:17-19, and 26:2.

The rest of the passion narrative merely carries through the expected plan set in motion by the events in the earlier part of the Gospel: Jesus' refugee status in childhood, the way his teachings infuriated the religious establishment, and his deliberate provocation of the rulers of the temple. Jesus' death defines the nature of his messiahship for a world accustomed to identifying rulers with human power.

#### XIV.g.i Matthew 27:27-31 - The Soldiers Mock Jesus

As the Roman soldiers took Jesus away to prepare him for crucifixion, they took one final opportunity to mock his supposed claims to kingship, the crime the Jews had brought before Pilate. They dressed him in a soldier's scarlet cloak, placed a crown of thorns on his head, abused and beat him most cruelly.

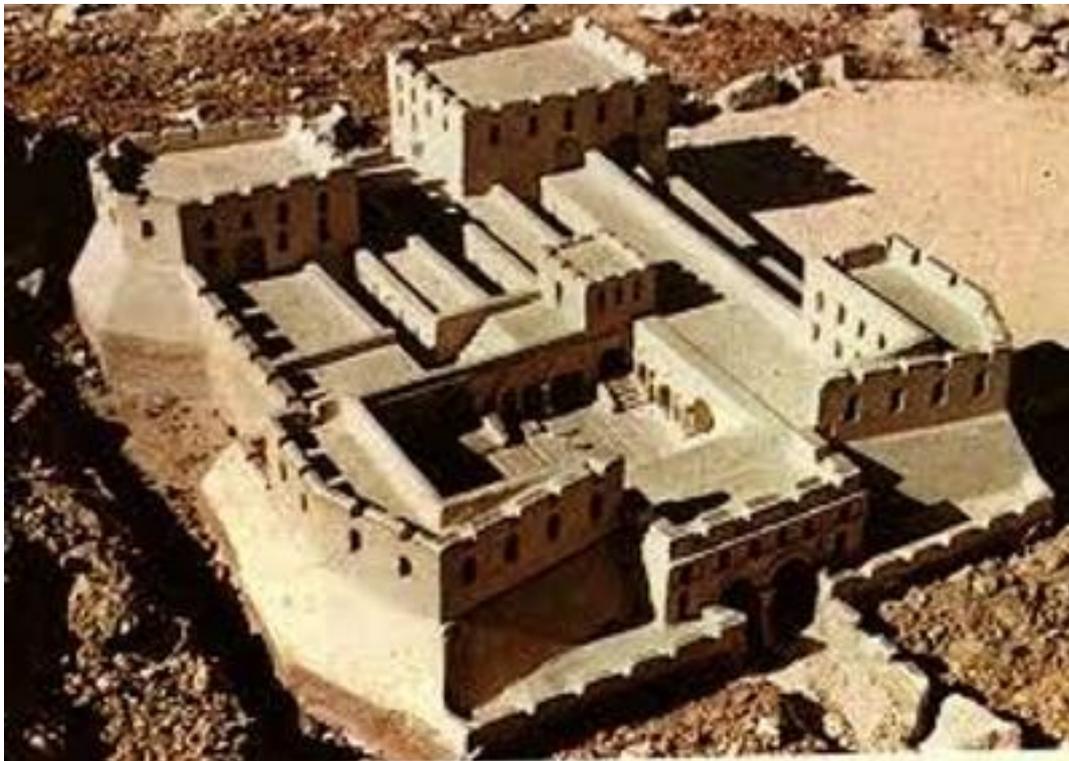
<sup>27</sup> Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole cohort around him.

#### Matthew 27:27

The governor's headquarters, the Prætorium, doubled as a garrison and a prison.

The location of the Prætorium has long been identified with the Antonia Fortress on the northwest corner of the Temple Mount, and this large fortress allowed immediate access to the temple in order to suppress any disturbance. Only portions of the walls of the original Antonia Fortress remain. However, many argue that the Palace of Herod, once the Jerusalem home of Herod the Great, but later in Roman hands was more lavish and afforded better accommodations for the Roman governor (Philo, Embassy to Gaius 299). It was used later by the governor Florus (Josephus, Jewish War 2.301).

This palace fortress, today called the Citadel, which was located at the prominent Jaffa Gate at the western entrance to the old city, has since Jesus' day been through many rounds of destruction and rebuilding, beginning with the capture of Jerusalem in AD70, and continuing until the Crusader period of the 11<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries. However, some original Herodian portions of the palace do still exist.



The Antonia Fortress

Whole cohort probably refers to a maniple, a third of a cohort, which was still 120-200 soldiers who would participate in this cruel and sadistic game. If Jesus had to be made such a spectacle for sport, how much more should his followers expect the same: <<*For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, as though sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels and to mortals*>> (1 Corinthians 4:9), and: <<*But recall those earlier days when, after you had been enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to abuse and persecution, and sometimes being partners with those so treated*>> (Hebrews 10:32-33).

<sup>28</sup> They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, <sup>29</sup> and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on his head. They put a reed in his right hand and knelt before him and mocked him, saying, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' <sup>30</sup> They spat on him, and took the reed and struck him on the head. <sup>31</sup> After mocking him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.

### Matthew 27:28-31

Put a scarlet robe on him. Roman soldiers in Jerusalem, mostly foreign conscripts, were infamous for playing cruel games with condemned prisoners, particularly insurrectionists, including dressing them in costume, in this case one of their own red cloaks, perhaps prompting the prophet's question: <<*Why are your robes red, and your garments like theirs who tread the wine press?*>> (Isaiah 63:2), and fulfilling Jacob's prophecy over the descendant of Judah who: <<*Binding his foal to the vine and his donkey's colt to the choice vine, he washes his garments in wine and his robe in the blood of grapes*>> (Genesis 49:11), then moving them around a huge game board as a 'game piece'. Still, their actions spoke louder than they knew. The one they dressed and hailed as a king was truly the crucified King. Mark and John describe the same cloak as purple; however, colours were not as clearly distinguished as they are today, and dyes varied, so a violet-red cloak might be called scarlet by some and purple by others.

Jesus wore the scarlet robe to signify he bore the sins of mankind: <<*since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*>> (Romans 3:23); their scarlet clothing can be washed in his blood to become pure white: <<*I said to him, 'Sir, you are the one that knows.' Then he said to me, 'These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb'*>> (Revelation 7:14).

Luke is the only Gospel author to record that Pilate sent Jesus to Herod Antipas when he learned that Jesus was considered to be a Galilæan. He then records that it was Herod's soldiers who had dressed him: <<*Even Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him; then he put an elegant robe on him, and sent him back to Pilate*>> (Luke 23:11). Overall, the four Gospel accounts give more consistency in the telling of the event. Some critics like to focus on apparent inconsistency in detail but none of these detract from the truth of what happened on that momentous day, the most significant historic event ever to occur.

Twisting some thorns into a crown. The soldiers no doubt used branches from a local shrub acanthus that had long, razor sharp thorns. Although it was most likely

twisted with the thorns protruding outward to represent a crown, it is almost certain that some thorns at least would have pierced Jesus' scalp as the crown was pushed down onto his head, causing painful lacerations and his blood to flow down his face - a different anointing to the recent one with pure nard at Bethany two days previously, as recorded in Matthew 26:6-13. The irony of those playing this cruel game is that they would not have realised the symbolism they provided to the result of original sin that Jesus came to purge: **<<thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you>>** (Genesis 3:18). Thus did Jesus bear the weight of sin: **<<Surely I would carry it on my shoulder; I would bind it on me like a crown>>** (Job 31:36).

In a remarkable foreshadowing of God giving up his Son, Abraham had been willing to sacrifice his own son Isaac to God until the substitutionary reprieve came through a sheep with a crown of thorns: **<<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).

They put a reed in his right hand refers to a stout cane that would normally be used to beat people with, as they did here, for they took the reed and struck him on the head. Thus it became his royal sceptre: **<<Your throne, O God, endures for ever and ever. Your royal sceptre is a sceptre of equity>>** (Psalm 45:6).

Their mocking of him with the title King of the Jews was ironic as he was indeed their King as well, had they but known it. Yet by including hail, Latin *ave*, they elevated Jesus to the status of that of Cæsar, if only in jest. Of course, Jesus was far above any earthly king or emperor: **<<God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come>>** (Ephesians 1:20-21).

They spat on him repeats the actions of the Jewish guards a few hours earlier: **<<Then they spat in his face and struck him; and some slapped him>>** (Matthew 26:67), an act that would disgust any decent person. Even in modern competitive sports such as football or rugby, it is an act that is deplored by the players and is punished most severely, yet these people would do this to the one who had come to save them from themselves. With such treatment of Jesus it is easy to understand why it was written of him that: **<<He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity; and as one from whom others hide their faces he was despised, and we held him of no account>>** (Isaiah 53:3).

#### XIV.g.ii Matthew 27:32-44 - The Crucifixion of Jesus

Jesus was forced to walk out to Golgotha, his place of execution, carrying the *patibulum*, or crossbeam of his Cross part of the way. Jesus was stripped naked and his garments shared by the Roman guards, fulfilling another prophecy. Despite the horror of the Cross, the mocking still continued, even by two criminals that were crucified on either side of Jesus.

<sup>32</sup> As they went out, they came upon a man from Cyrene named Simon; they compelled this man to carry his cross.

## Matthew 27:32

A man of Cyrene named Simon. Cyrene was a region in North Africa with a large Jewish population. Simon was likely a Jew who had travelled to Jerusalem for the Passover. Whether he was a Diaspora Jew or an ethnic African converted to Judaism is not known. His sons are also mentioned by Mark giving rise to the conclusion that they were known to those in the early church when the Gospel first came into circulation: <<*They compelled a passer-by, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus*>> (Mark 15:21).

Jesus was severely weakened from the scourging and loss of blood (v.26), and was therefore unable to carry his Cross, which weighed 30 to 40 pounds. The skin and muscles of his back would have been severely lacerated, and he could have suffered loss of blood and severe injury to his internal organs.

The most common Greek word for cross is *stauros*. Although originally designating a sharpened pole, it became associated before the NT with various penal means of suspending bodies, both before and after death, including those employing a crux, or cross-shaped device, for crucifixion.

Jesus had carried the wooden beam for part of the journey, just as Isaac had carried the wood that would have been used in his own sacrifice had God not intervened: <<*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).

Although it is not our place to pass judgement on the apostles during this severe time of testing, one cannot help but wonder why at least one of them was not on hand to carry the Lord's Cross for him!

<sup>33</sup> And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull),

## Matthew 27:33

Golgotha is a transliteration of the Aramaic word for skull. 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 early church knew that the place where Jesus was crucified looked like a skull, or to be more specific a cranium, which is the skull-pan or upper part of the skull. Instead of using the ancient Greek word *skulla* the Gospels use the word *kranion*.



The traditional location of Golgotha was outside of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century city walls  
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<sup>34</sup> they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall; but when he tasted it, he would not drink it.

#### Matthew 27:34

They offered him wine to drink in keeping with the words of King Lemuel's mother: <<*Give strong drink to one who is perishing, and wine to those in bitter distress; let them drink and forget their poverty, and remember their misery no more*>> (Proverbs 31:6-7), yet no one should forget the misery and suffering of Christ on the Cross.

This was one more mockery in that the wine they offered was mixed with gall, which many commentators say was a bitter herb that would cause greater

# thirst and could even be poisonous, providing unpleasant ill effects. Other commentators refer to it as an opiate that was meant to dull the pain Jesus would suffer, thus refusing it would increase his sense of pain in death. Had he accepted this cup it could have been said: <<*In his own hand the priest shall have the water of bitterness that brings the curse*>> (Numbers 5:18b), although the offering of it was foretold: <<*They gave me poison for food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink*>> (Psalm 69:21).

He would not drink it even though he was no doubt in great need of hydration, something he would acknowledge shortly before death: <<*After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfil the scripture), 'I am thirsty'*>> (John 19:28). He did however taste of this and every other bitter cup that was offered to him.

<sup>35</sup> And when they had crucified him, they divided his clothes among themselves by casting lots;

[[In some ancient manuscripts it is written: 'in order that what had been spoken through the prophet might be fulfilled, 'They divided my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots']]

#### Matthew 27:35

When they had crucified 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, (Josephus, Jewish War 5.449-551), although the use of nails and a crossbar appear to have been common. Like all Roman crucifixion victims, Jesus would have been naked, thus adding to his public shame, a reminder of initial sin: <<*Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves*>> (Genesis 3:7), as well as exposing any bodily functions that occurred while he was on the Cross. In addition, flies would have swarmed into his open wounds, eating his flesh and laying eggs in his body.

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 ever practised 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 shock due to the physical trauma inflicted on him.

Crucifixion remained the preferred method of execution for non-Roman citizens until it was outlawed by the first Christian emperor Constantine the Great, who reigned from AD306-337.

They divided his clothes among themselves by casting lots is a clear reference to Psalm 22:18. Matthew alludes to Psalm 22 throughout much of the narrative without his typical fulfilment formula; refer to comments made on Matthew 1:22. His readers would know that the soldiers' actions fulfilled Scripture, even though they were a long accepted Roman practice.

Sometimes the casting of lots was to determine God's will, such as the division of the Holy Land by tribe: <<*So the men went and traversed the land and set down in a book a description of it by towns in seven divisions; then they came back to Joshua in the camp at Shiloh, and Joshua cast lots for them in Shiloh before the Lord; and there Joshua apportioned the land to the Israelites, to each a portion*>> (Joshua 18:9-10), or replacing Judas as an apostle after his death: <<*So they proposed two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also known as Justus, and Matthias. Then they prayed and said, 'Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which one of these two you have chosen to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.'* And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles>> (Acts 1:23-26). Here, the soldiers were simply gambling for the garments as they did not want to tear the cloth.

<sup>36</sup> then they sat down there and kept watch over him.

#### Matthew 27:36

They sat down. Despite his severely weakened state the soldiers knew it might take hours or even days for a victim to die. Their role was to ensure that he died on the Cross and was not either rescued or his corpse removed until permission was given. Therefore, they kept watch over him.

Thus, these soldiers and their centurion would be eye witnesses to the events that would lead to the conclusion: <<*Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, 'Truly this man was God's Son!'*>> (Mark 15:39), which is also recorded in v.54.

<sup>37</sup> Over his head they put the charge against him, which read, 'This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.'

#### Matthew 27:37

Over his head gives further confirmation that Jesus' crucifixion was on a traditionally shaped cross, i.e. not a **T** or an **X**, but a **†**.

The charge against him was written on a placard and placed above Jesus' head as a deterrent against any who would dare to rise up against Rome. It was written in New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised

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the three common languages of the time to ensure maximum readership from those passing by: <<*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 King of the Jews was the inscription chosen by Pilate and caused dismay among the Jewish religious leadership: <<*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.”’ Pilate answered, ‘What I have written I have written’>> (John 19:21-22).*

<sup>38</sup> Then two bandits were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left.

### Matthew 27:38

Bandits or robbers, Greek *lēstēs*, is sometimes rendered insurrectionist, which is possible, but the alleged examples in extra-biblical literature are not conclusive, and the meaning bandit or robber is appropriate in all 24 examples of *lēstēs* in the NT and Septuagint. Nothing more is known about the background of these men. Jesus’ crucifixion with criminals fulfils messianic prophecy: <<*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).

One on his right and one on his left were the positions once requested by the mother of James and John: <<*And he said to her, ‘What do you want?’ She said to him, ‘Declare that these two sons of mine will sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom’>> (Matthew 20:21). It is unlikely they would have had this particular fate in mind and were thankful it did not come to that so quickly, although James would be the first apostle to be martyred: <<*About that time King Herod laid violent hands upon some who belonged to the church. He had James, the brother of John, killed with the sword*>> (Acts 12:1-2).*

<sup>39</sup> Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads <sup>40</sup> and saying, ‘You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.’

### Matthew 27:39-40

Since it says that Jesus was crucified outside of the city walls: <<*Therefore Jesus also suffered outside the city gate in order to sanctify the people by his own blood*>> (Hebrews 13:12), those who passed by probably included many pilgrims who had come to Jerusalem for the Passover, but were staying outside of the city.

Derided him is the Greek *eblasphemoun* from which blasphemy is derived, and here was true blasphemy, deriding the one who was equal with God: <<*For this reason the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because he was not only breaking the sabbath, but was also calling God his own Father, thereby making himself equal to God*>> (John 5:18), yet it was he: <<*who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited*>> (Philippians 2:6); instead, he accepted the Cross. They mocked

Jesus' claim of supernatural power because he now appeared completely weak and helpless on the Cross.

Shaking their heads is an allusion to: <<*All who see me mock at me; they make mouths at me, they shake their heads*>> (Psalm 22:7). David had written of the mockery of some who even seemed to deride his faith, implying he was a hypocrite. However, the whole Psalm is messianic and moves from suffering to great victory. This is the way that passersby had responded when the city had been destroyed by the Babylonians 600 years earlier: <<*All who pass along the way clap their hands at you; they hiss and wag their heads at daughter Jerusalem; 'Is this the city that was called the perfection of beauty, the joy of all the earth?'*>> (Lamentations 2:15). They did so again to the author of their salvation.

Come down from the Cross. This would have been music to Satan's ears for without the Cross there could be no reconciliation between God and mankind. However, Jesus had the power and will to resist using his divine powers to free himself from his human suffering.

<sup>41</sup> In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking him, saying, <sup>42</sup> 'He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him. <sup>43</sup> He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he wants to; for he said, "I am God's Son.'" <sup>44</sup> The bandits who were crucified with him also taunted him in the same way.

#### Matthew 27:41-44

The chief priests, with the scribes and elders, were mocking him. The highest levels of Israel's establishment sought one more opportunity to insult Jesus. The religious leaders did not address Jesus directly, but turned to one another as they mocked him. It should be noted that this was the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread and the priests should have been serving in the temple, yet they neglected their duty to God and his people to view this spectacle.

He saved others; he cannot save himself. Their mockery was misguided for although Jesus was crucified in weakness, it was his great strength because, by accepting this death, he did indeed save all others who would come to believe in him because of what he did. Paul acknowledges this strength through apparent weakness: <<*For he was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God. For we are weak in him, but in dealing with you we will live with him by the power of God*>> (2 Corinthians 13:4).

Let him come down from the Cross now, and we will believe in him was a hollow claim for two days later he came up from the grave and yet they would still not believe in him. Consider, which was the more powerful miracle?

Let God deliver him is an allusion to: <<*Commit your cause to the Lord; let him deliver – let him rescue the one in whom he delights!*>> (Psalm 22:8). Refer also to comments on v.35.

The bandits who were crucified with him also taunted him in the same way. It seems quite bizarre that anyone would wish to act that way while suffering the same fate. However, one of them would come to recognise Jesus as his Saviour and would receive saving grace before his death: <<*One of the criminals who were*

*hanged there kept deriding him and saying, 'Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!' But the other rebuked him, saying, 'Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.' Then he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' He replied, 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise'>> (Luke 23:39-43).*

#### XIV.h Matthew 27:45-56 - The Death of Jesus

After being on the Cross for about six hours, comparing v.45 with: <<**It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him**>> (Mark 15:25), Jesus died. A series of testimonies from: the temple (v.51); the dead (vv.51b-53); and Gentiles (v.54); indicate the historical and theological impact of Jesus' death. Matthew makes mention of the women who watched these scenes unfold (vv.55-56).

<sup>45</sup> From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon.

#### Matthew 27:45

From noon on, until three in the afternoon. Josephus records that the ninth hour, i.e. between 15:00-16:00, was the time when Jews offered the daily evening sacrifice (Jewish Antiquities 14.65).

Darkness came over the whole land. This was not a solar eclipse, since Passover occurred during a full moon, and a solar eclipse can occur only during a new moon; rather, it was a supernatural act of God, displaying his displeasure and judgment upon humanity for crucifying his Son: <<**The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining**>> (Joel 3:15). Astronomers have identified a probable lunar eclipse if this did occur on Friday Nisan 15 AD33. However, God would not need natural elements to produce this effect, nor would a lunar eclipse have been as dark or long lasting.

During his time in Athens, Paul addressed the Areopagus. One of its members was a man named Dionysius. According to Eusebius, Dionysius was a judge and senator in the Areopagus on Mars Hill. He was a local Athenian, who had studied astrology in Egypt and was there at the time of the miraculous darkness that occurred during the Saviour's passion, something he took particular note of, recording it as, 'either the God of nature is suffering, or the machine of the world is tumbling into ruin'. When he returned to Athens, he would at first dispute with Paul and then came to faith in Jesus, realising his past error and idolatry. He went on to be the first Bishop of Athens. By this one convert alone, Paul's labours in Athens were not in vain.

Another prophet perhaps foresaw this day when he wrote: <<**For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you**>> (Isaiah 60:2). It is these words that inspired worship leader Godfrey Birtill to write 'There's great darkness over the land, a deep darkness on the people. But a light is shining that the dark can't understand: Light of the World - King Jesus'.

The Jews had asked for a sign from heaven, this darkness was one. It might not have been the three days inside the fish that some had expected - that was yet to come - but Jonah would have been in complete darkness inside that fish just

**the same:** <<‘An evil and adulterous generation asks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah.’ Then he left them and went away>> (Matthew 16:4).

His scourging and then the agony of crucifixion had made Jesus into an horrific sight beyond imagination, as was foretold of the Messiah: <<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>> (Isaiah 52:14). Thus three hours of darkness, hiding this hideous form from the sight of his mother and the disciples, and indeed any other decent person, was a blessing from God.

<sup>46</sup> And about three o’clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, ‘Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?’ that is, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’

### Matthew 27:46

About three o’clock is given as the ninth hour in the original and refers to between 15:00-16:00. As mentioned in comments on v.45, this was the time for the evening sacrifice but was also the time that Daniel received his vision of the Messiah that was still to come in his day: <<while I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen before in a vision, came to me in swift flight at the time of the evening sacrifice. He came and said to me, ‘Daniel, I have now come out to give you wisdom and understanding. At the beginning of your supplications a word went out, and I have come to declare it, for you are greatly beloved. So consider the word and understand the vision: ‘Seventy weeks are decreed for your people and your holy city: to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place>> (Daniel 9:21-24).

Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani? Once again Jesus quoted King David, this time from Psalm 22:1 <<My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?>> Refer to comments made on v.35 and vv.41-44. The expression is in Aramaic, the everyday language spoken by Jesus.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? These are some of the most profoundly mysterious words in the entire Bible, yet even in this time of forsakenness Jesus’ prayers were heard: <<In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission>> (Hebrews 5:7). In a true sense Jesus had to be cut off from the favour of and fellowship with the Father that had been his eternally, because he was bearing the sins of his people and therefore enduring God’s wrath: <<All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all>> (Isaiah 53:6), <<Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him with pain. When you make his life an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring, and shall prolong his days; through him the will of the Lord shall prosper>> (Isaiah 53:10), <<Your eyes are too pure to behold evil, and you cannot look on wrongdoing; why do you look on the treacherous, and are silent when the wicked swallow those more righteous than they?>> (Habakkuk 1:13), <<whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to show his righteousness, because

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*in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed>> (Romans 3:25), <<For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God>> (2 Corinthians 5:21), <<Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us – for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’>> (Galatians 3:13), <<and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world>> (1 John 2:2). Being separated from the Father for the only time in all eternity was no doubt more crushing for his soul than any physical pain or even bearing the wrath of God for the sins of mankind could ever have been. Yet Jesus knew in his heart that he had not been forsaken: <<And those who know your name put their trust in you, for you, O Lord, have not forsaken those who seek you>> (Psalm 9:10), and Jesus’ heart was to always seek the Father and to do his will.*

Jesus had spent all of eternity as one person in a community of three: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In his moment of human death he found himself as one of three people; two dying for their own crimes, the other for the crimes of all peoples.

Yet, in quoting Psalm 22:1 Jesus probably had in mind the remainder of the psalm as well, which moves on to a cry of victory (Psalm 22:21-31); and he had expressed true faith, calling his Father my God.

It is a certainty that Jesus knew why he is dying, for this was the purpose of his coming to earth: <<From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised>> (Matthew 16:21), <<See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified; and on the third day he will be raised>> (Matthew 20:18-19), and: <<just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many>> (Matthew 20:28).

It is just as certain that his cry, uttered with a loud voice, was expressing, not bewilderment at his plight, but witness to the bystanders, and through them to the world, that he was experiencing God-forsakenness not for anything in himself but for the salvation of others. Surely Matthew, understanding this, quoted Jesus’ words to challenge his readers. Jesus’ torment, despite his anticipations of it in Gethsemane, was surely inconceivable in advance.

<sup>47</sup> When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, ‘This man is calling for Elijah.’

#### Matthew 27:47

Jesus’ call to God in Aramaic, ‘Eli, ‘Eli, must have sounded similar to the Hebrew name for Elijah, which is ‘Eliyahu, thus the bystanders misunderstand it as a summons to the prophet.

The Jews had expected Elijah to personally return in accordance with prophecy: <<Lo, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes>> (Malachi 4:5), although Jesus had confirmed that this was fulfilled in the person of John the Baptist: <<He replied, ‘Elijah is

*indeed coming and will restore all things; but I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognise him, but they did to him whatever they pleased. So also the Son of Man is about to suffer at their hands.’ Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them about John the Baptist>> (Matthew 17:11-13).*

<sup>48</sup> At once one of them ran and got a sponge, filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink.

#### Matthew 27:48

Sour wine was used as a daily drink with meals by common people and soldiers. It was cheaper than regular wine and effectively quenched thirst. Here, it fulfilled yet another of David’s prophecies: <<*They gave me poison for food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink*>> (Psalm 69:21).

<sup>49</sup> But the others said, ‘Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him.’

[[Some ancient manuscripts add ‘And another took a spear and pierced his side, and out came water and blood’, which is included in John 19:34]]

#### Matthew 27:49

Let us see whether Elijah will come is confirmation that they expected a return of Elijah as recorded in Malachi 4:5 and commented on in v.47.

<sup>50</sup> Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last.

#### Matthew 27:50

With a loud voice. This was no dying mortal’s whimper but the cry of triumph of God’s Spirit leaving the mortal flesh behind in order to be reunited with the Father. His words are recorded elsewhere: <<*When Jesus had received the wine, he said, ‘It is finished.’ Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit*>> (John 19:30).

Breathed his last is also translated yielded up his spirit, since the Greek word for breath and spirit are the same. Therefore, even in death, Jesus maintained authoritative control over his destiny: <<*For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father*>> (John 10:17-18), and: <<*one who has become a priest, not through a legal requirement concerning physical descent, but through the power of an indestructible life*>> (Hebrews 7:16). If ‘his spirit’ is intended this would refer to his human spirit. While Jesus’ body remained on the Cross and was then put in the tomb, his spirit went immediately into the presence of God his Father: <<*He replied, ‘Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.’ It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, while the sun’s light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, ‘Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.’ Having said this, he breathed his last*>> (Luke 23:43-46), further confirmed by: <<*and the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it*>> (Ecclesiastes 12:7 NIV), and in this way  
New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised Matthew 27-23

he became the pattern for believers who would die after him: <<Yes, we do have confidence, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord>> (2 Corinthians 5:8), <<I am hard pressed between the two: my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better>> (Philippians 1:23), <<and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect>> (Hebrews 12:23).

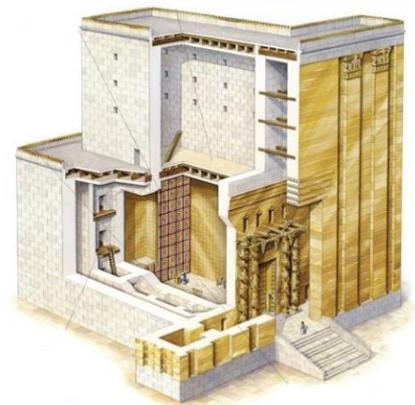
Despite the claims of some, including Discovery Television documentaries, Jesus the man was dead. He didn't just pass out to be revived later; he had truly died. Thus it could be written in fulfilment of the requirements of the Council of God: <<For this reason he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, because a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions under the first covenant>> (Hebrews 9:15).

<sup>51</sup> At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split.

### Matthew 27:51

The curtain of the temple refers to the curtain between the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place, which was an elaborately woven fabric of 72 twisted plaits of 24 threads each. It was 60 feet or 18 m high and 30 feet or 9.1 m wide. No one was allowed to enter the Most Holy Place behind the curtain except the high priest, and he only once a year, on the Day of Atonement.

Torn in two signifies the removal of the separation between God and the people. An extended commentary on this event, and the heavenly reality that it symbolised, is found in Hebrews 9:1-10:22.



The location of the curtain

Paul also viewed this as a removal of the separation between Jew and Gentile in order to welcome all into one church of those who would accept Jesus as the Christ of God: <<For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, so that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it>> (Ephesians 2:14-16).

Jesus had also made a way back to God following the dreadful separation he had endured on the Cross, as foreseen by the prophet: <<Their prince shall be one of their own, their ruler shall come from their midst; I will bring him near, and he shall approach me, for who would otherwise dare to approach me? says the Lord>> (Jeremiah 30:21).

The earth shook. Palestine sits on a major seismic rift, so earthquakes were not uncommon, but the splitting of rocks and opening of tombs (v.52) make this a major testimony to the meaning of Jesus' death and resurrection. It was as if the

earth was protesting at receiving the blood of Christ. The prophets had written: <<*Shall not the land tremble on this account, and everyone mourn who lives in it, and all of it rise like the Nile, and be tossed about and sink again, like the Nile of Egypt?*>> (Amos 8:8), <<*Who can stand before his indignation? Who can endure the heat of his anger? His wrath is poured out like fire, and by him the rocks are broken in pieces*>> (Nahum 1:6), and: <<*For thus says the Lord of hosts: Once again, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land*>> (Haggai 2:6).

<sup>52</sup> The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. <sup>53</sup> After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many.

### Matthew 27:52-53

Saints who had fallen asleep probably refers to pious OT figures and godly intertestamental Jews, re-embodied to witness to the new order of things that was now in the process of dawning. Prime candidates would have been Jesus' supposed father Joseph, Zechariah, Simeon, John the Baptist and others that had been known to the disciples. This shows that the resurrection of people who died looking forward to the Messiah depends on Christ's actual death and resurrection, just as does the future resurrection of Jesus' disciples today.

After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city. Matthew apparently jumped ahead here, treating incidents topically, as he often does, and begins to speak of events that would happen after the resurrection. The wording suggests that these saints were not merely brought back to life, as was Lazarus: <<*The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, and let him go'*>> (John 11:44); but were raised with new, resurrection bodies, a foretaste of what would happen to all believers at Christ's return. No other historical information about this event has been found, but it is natural to suppose that if they had resurrection bodies, they would not have died again. They may have been taken up to heaven at or after Jesus' ascension, which is recorded in Acts 1:1-11.

That they entered the holy city and appeared to many but clearly not all may account for why there is no official supporting historical documentation, for Jesus too, although he appeared to several hundred people: <<*Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died*>> (1 Corinthians 15:6), was not generally seen in public, for his final 40 days was to encourage his believers and build their faith, not to make a public statement to the establishment.

This is one of the most curious passages of Scripture and there have been many scholars, commentators and indeed disciples who would wish to have more detail of what happened and the true purpose it served. Yet what is clear is that Scripture is not given in order to satisfy curiosity, it is given to instruct us, and should be accepted in faith as the Word of God. What can be learned from it is that the saving grace of Christ has always been there for all who believed in whatever form that may have taken before his time on earth for: <<*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever*>> (Hebrews 13:8), and that a general resurrection of the dead is a reality.

<sup>54</sup> Now when the centurion and those with him, who were keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were terrified and said, 'Truly this man was God's Son!'

#### Matthew 27:54

The centurion and those with him, i.e. his guards, were hardened soldiers accustomed to seeing crucifixions and were perhaps battle veterans, yet these cataclysmic events, coupled with the extraordinary self-control, purity and love shown by Jesus in his death, made the centurion realise that Jesus was God's Son.

The Jews had said they would believe Jesus to be the Christ if he displayed the power to come down from the Cross (v.40). When he did not, they would not believe. The centurion however perceived the power that would have allowed Jesus to come down from the Cross and yet he did not. This is what made the centurion realise the true identity of this man they had just killed, yet lives on.

Although Mark supports Matthew: <<Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, 'Truly this man was God's Son!''>> (Mark 15:39), Luke records this event as: <<When the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God and said, 'Certainly this man was innocent''>> (Luke 23:47). For Luke this confession was important and served as the culminating expression of Jesus' innocence, a key theme in Luke. It also noted that it caused the Gentile centurion to praise God.

<sup>55</sup> Many women were also there, looking on from a distance; they had followed Jesus from Galilee and had provided for him. <sup>56</sup> Among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

#### Matthew 27:55-56

These women had accompanied Jesus as his disciples: <<These used to follow him and provided for him when he was in Galilee; and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem>> (Mark 15:41), and: <<Soon afterwards he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him, as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their resources>> (Luke 8:1-3), here they had witnessed the crucifixion: <<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), and would be the first witnesses to his resurrection: <<When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him>> (Mark 16:1).

For those who have chosen to follow Jesus it is very easy to rush forward to Sunday and the glorious resurrection that forms the basis of the Christian faith. However, it must never be allowed to diminish the power of the Cross, and perhaps this is an opportunity to take a break from this study to contemplate the imagery and words of 'You Are My King' (Amazing Love), sung by Candi Pearson.



The imagery in the video is from 'The Passion Of Christ' directed by Mel Gibson. In the scenes of the nails being hammered into Christ, only the hand holding the mallet is seen. It was apparently Mel Gibson hammering the nails in, as he felt that it is something that he, and therefore all of mankind, caused and continue to do so through their sin. This is something for all people to perhaps reflect on!

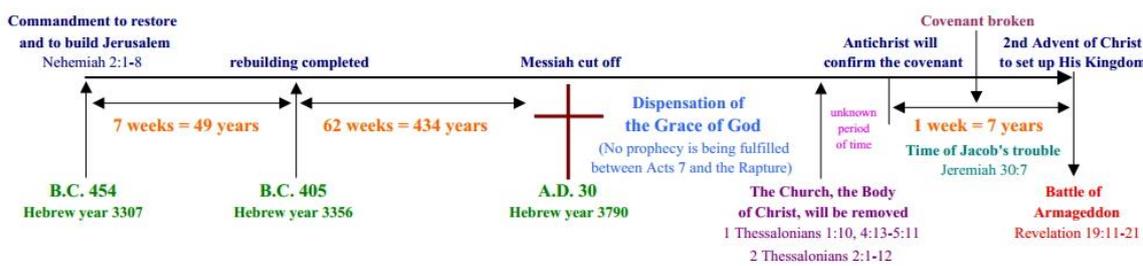
If you are watching this on YouTube and the video is blocked in your region, it can be downloaded in Windows Media Video format from:

[www.thewordisalive.co.uk/new-testament/the-gospels/matthew](http://www.thewordisalive.co.uk/new-testament/the-gospels/matthew).

Determining the actual date of Jesus' death is something that has taxed scholars throughout church history. It is known that it was Nisan 15 and that Pilate was governor of Judæa from AD26-36, providing four possibilities when Nisan 15 occurred on a Friday:

- 11<sup>th</sup> April AD27
- 7<sup>th</sup> April AD30
- 3<sup>rd</sup> April AD33
- 28<sup>th</sup> March AD36

Because Jesus was born in or before 4BC, which was the year Herod the Great died, and that Jesus was around 30 years old when his ministry began, the two favoured dates were those in AD30 and AD33. The text: <<*In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius*>> (Luke 3:1a), would give a start date for Jesus' ministry of probably AD29, thus 3 years of ministry makes 3<sup>rd</sup> April AD33 the most likely. However, analysts of the prophecy of 70 weeks in Daniel Chapter 9, which was made some 500 years before Jesus was born, come up with the year AD30 by separate calculation. Refer also to comments made on Matthew 14:3-4 that would also favour AD30.



### Outline of Daniel's 70 weeks prophecy

#### XIV.i Matthew 27:57-61 - The Burial of Jesus

Matthew recounts the recovery and preparation of Jesus' body, his burial in a new rich man's tomb and the women who observed the process so they could return to minister to the body after the Sabbath.

<sup>57</sup> When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathæa, named Joseph, who was also a disciple of Jesus. <sup>58</sup> He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. <sup>59</sup> So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth <sup>60</sup> and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away.

#### Matthew 27:57-60

When it was evening. The Sabbath day would start at sunset, around 18:00 and Joseph would have to act in haste in order to bury the body while it was still permissible to do so, for it was not appropriate work for a Sabbath.

A rich man from Arimathæa, named Joseph is identified as a member of the Sanhedrin, who had opposed their findings in the second trial (v.1). His high standing within the Jewish community gave him access to Pilate. The location of Arimathæa is uncertain, considered by some to be perhaps Ramathaim in the hill country of Ephraim, 20 miles or 32 km northwest of Jerusalem. Matthew had earlier written: *<<His disciples came and took the body and buried it; then they went and told Jesus>>* (Matthew 14:12), but that referred to the brave and noble action of those who had followed John the Baptist. The male disciples of Jesus were mostly conspicuous by their absence, with only John recorded as an eye witness to the Cross: *<<When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, 'Woman, here is your son.' 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). Mary stayed with John, even moving to Ephesus with him before the destruction of Jerusalem in AD70.

As previously commented on, Lazarus, Martha and Mary were probably relatively wealthy, being able to afford pure nard with which to anoint Jesus (John 12:3). Here also, Joseph was another wealthy camel that had squeezed through the eye of a needle. Refer to comments made on Matthew 19:24.

Asked for the body of Jesus. Jewish custom dictated that crucified bodies should be taken down before evening: *<<his corpse must not remain all night upon the tree; you shall bury him that same day, for anyone hung on a tree is under God's curse. You must not defile the land that the Lord your God is giving you for possession>>* (Deuteronomy 21:23), especially before the Sabbath, which began at sundown on Friday.

Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth. Joseph was assisted by the influential Pharisee Nicodemus: *<<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. Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of*  
New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised Matthew 27-28

*the Jews*>> (John 19:38-40). Thus Jesus' burial, unlike his death, was undertaken with great care, respect and love.

The new tomb was most likely a rectangular chamber cut into rock. It was accessed through a low entry room and blocked with a stone that could be rolled back and forth, mainly to protect the body from wild animals or grave robbers. The use of a rich man's tomb fulfils the prophecy: <<***They made his grave with the wicked and his tomb with the rich, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth***>> (Isaiah 53:9). To have placed Jesus' body in his own tomb was an act of love and great respect. A prophet once showed the same respect for a man of God, even though it was the prophet's trickery that led to the man's death in the first place: <<***He laid the body in his own grave; and they mourned over him, saying, 'Alas, my brother!' After he had buried him, he said to his sons, 'When I die, bury me in the grave in which the man of God is buried; lay my bones beside his bones***>> (1 Kings 13:30-31).

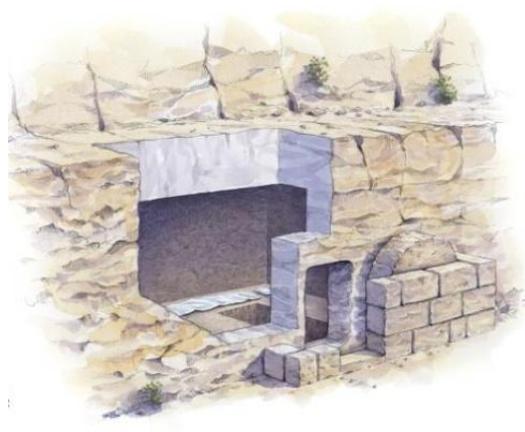
The two main locations, where Jesus is thought to have been buried are the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, to the west of the temple; and the Garden Tomb, north of the ancient city. Both would have been outside the 1<sup>st</sup> Century city walls.

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.



Church Of The Holy Sepulchre



A tomb similar to that of Jesus

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 become Joseph of Arimathæa's family tomb.

Rock-cut tombs would have rolling stone doors and inside burials would occur in loculi, i.e. beds cut into the 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>61</sup> Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.

#### Matthew 27:61

The other Mary was most likely the Mother of Jesus: <<*Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas?>> (Matthew 13:55), for Joses in Mark 15:40 is probably Joseph, or it could refer to the wife of Alphæus, mother of the two apostles, James the Younger and Matthew known also as Levi: <<*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), <<*These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax-collector; James son of Alphæus, and Thaddæus; Simon the Cananæan, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him>> (Matthew 10:3-4), and: <<*As he was walking along, he saw Levi son of Alphæus sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, 'Follow me.'* And he got up and followed him>> (Mark 2:17). James the Younger was also known as James the Less to avoid confusion with James Zebedee and James the brother of Jesus, or son of Joseph and Mary at least.***

For this Mary to be the wife of Alphæus would have required her to also have a son called Joses or Joseph as well. There is no other evidence to support this. Although referred to as James the younger in Mark 15:40, it could be James the son of Joseph and Mary that was intended. Another possibility is that Mary the mother of Jesus and Mary the mother of James the younger were both present.

#### XIV.j Matthew 27:62-66 - The Guard at the Tomb

The religious leaders feared that Jesus' followers would try to steal the body and then make false claims that Jesus had risen from the dead, just as he had claimed that he would: <<*Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again>> (Mark 8:31). Therefore, they sought action to prevent this by having Pilate authorise an armed guard at the tomb and having the stone sealed over the entrance.*

Unknown to them, their actions actually added to the authenticity of the resurrection account because his disciples could not possibly have been able to access Jesus' body and thus the empty tomb two days later could only have been achieved through the power of God's Holy Spirit. Thus Jesus was raised to life.

<sup>62</sup> The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate

## Matthew 27:62

The next day, after the day of Preparation is the Sabbath.

The chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate. Once again, these men were so fixated on the removal of Jesus that they neglected their Sabbath duties in order to see to other business.

<sup>63</sup> and said, ‘Sir, we remember what that impostor said while he was still alive, “After three days I will rise again.” <sup>64</sup> Therefore command that the tomb be made secure until the third day; otherwise his disciples may go and steal him away, and tell the people, “He has been raised from the dead”, and the last deception would be worse than the first.’ <sup>65</sup> Pilate said to them, ‘You have a guard of soldiers; go, make it as secure as you can.’ <sup>66</sup> So they went with the guard and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone.

## Matthew 27:63-66

We remember what that impostor said. Despite all that they had witnessed, the religious leaders’ hearts were hardened beyond the point of no return. Even when Jesus did rise from death most of them at least would not be moved from this stubborn position. These men were scholars and yet they could not see they were acting just as Pharaoh had: <<*Still Pharaoh’s heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the Lord had said*>> (Exodus 7:13).

The priests were correct in saying the last deception would be worse than the first for if the disciples, who had given up everything to follow Jesus on the understanding that he was their Messiah, subsequently had to steal the body to pretend that Jesus had risen from the dead when he had not, they were to be pitied as Paul acknowledged: <<*If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied*>> (1 Corinthians 15:19).

What proponents to the idea that the body was stolen from the tomb fail to accept is who would want to steal it:

- Why would the Romans or Jewish authorities steal the body? The only reason would be to prevent the tomb from becoming a shrine. If they had taken the body, they could have soon quashed any rumours of a resurrection simply by revealing the body.
- If grave robbers had taken the body, why would they have left behind the only item of value in this new tomb, the grave cloths: <<*Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself*>> (John 20:6-7).
- Why would the disciples want to perpetuate a con trick if indeed their Lord was not raised from death? They had shown no courage to stay with him in the last days of his life, why would they place themselves in danger after his death for a known lie? And why did these men that ran and hid when Jesus was arrested suddenly become bold evangelists, defying the authorities by publically proclaiming the Gospel, placing themselves in great danger in doing so, if they knew Jesus to be dead?

They would only act the way they did if indeed Jesus was raised from death and had made himself known to them.

Pilate said to them. Pilate had readily given the body to Joseph (v.58), and was now willing to let the Jews use the Roman soldiers allocated to them for the temple to pacify both sides. However, he was not prepared it seems to allow any soldiers from the Antonia Fortress to be released to this duty. Pilate would have been fully aware of the darkness and the earthquakes, and would no doubt have called for the centurion to give an account. Tertullian wrote of Pilate that, 'In his conscience he was a Christian'. Yet if King Agrippa and Festus could not be convinced by the weight of evidence: <<**Agrippa said to Paul, 'Are you so quickly persuading me to become a Christian?'**>> (Acts 26:28), it seems unlikely that Pilate would have been persuaded either.

A guard of soldiers is the same Roman military guard assigned to oversee temple security, such as those carrying swords who were sent out to arrest Jesus: <<**While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; with him was a large crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people**>> (Matthew 26:47).

Made the tomb secure by sealing the stone. The stones used to seal tombs were typically so large and heavy that it would take at least two men just to move them, and then only slowly. This is confirmed by the use of the plural: <<**So they took away the stone**>> (John 11:41a), when the stone was rolled away from Lazarus' tomb.

The stone could not be moved from the inside and there would be no other way into the tomb short of tunnelling through rock that would take weeks or even months of excavation work. Yet the priests still sealed the tomb to make sure it could not be tampered with.

Despite all human endeavour to keep the body of Jesus in the tomb, God's Holy Spirit would prove to be a power beyond comprehension, for he would indeed raise his Son just as was always promised: <<**For in him every one of God's promises is a 'Yes.'** For this reason it is through him that we say the 'Amen', to the glory of God>> (2 Corinthians 1:20).