

Chapter Twenty-three (23:1-56)

THE SON OF MAN CRUCIFIED

IDEAS TO INVESTIGATE:

1. Why did the Jews take Jesus to Pilate—why didn't they kill Him themselves (23:1ff.)?
2. Why did Herod want to see "some sign" by Jesus (23:8)?
3. What charges did the Jews make against Jesus to Pilate (23:14)?
4. After Pilate had declared Jesus innocent of the charges, why did he propose to chastise Jesus before releasing Him (23:16)?
5. Why did Pilate finally give in to the demands of the Jews that Jesus be crucified (23:24)?
6. What did Jesus mean in His reference to the "green wood" and the "dry" (23:31)?
7. What does death by crucifixion mean (23:33)?
8. How could Jesus promise the thief on the cross salvation if he had not been baptized (23:43)?
9. How could a Roman centurion "praise God" at the crucifixion of Jesus—which God was he praising (23:47)?
10. What is the day of Preparation? What significance has the note of the day of Jesus' crucifixion (23:54)?

SECTION 1

Indicted (23:1-25)

23 Then the whole company of them arose, and brought him before Pilate. ²And they began to accuse him, saying, "We found this man perverting our nation, and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ a king." ³And Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" And he answered him, "You have said so." ⁴And Pilate said to the chief priests and the multitudes, "I find no crime in this man." ⁵But they were urgent, saying, "He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee even to this place."

⁶ When Pilate heard this, he asked whether the man was a Galilean. ⁷And when he learned that he belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him over to Herod, who was himself in Jerusalem at that time. ⁸When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had long desired to see him, because he had heard about him, and he was hoping to see some sign done by him. ⁹So he questioned him at some length; but he made no answer. ¹⁰The chief priests and the scribes stood by vehemently

accusing him.¹¹ And Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him; then, arraying him in gorgeous apparel, he sent him back to Pilate.¹² And Herod and Pilate became friends with each other that very day, for before this they had been at enmity with each other.

13 Pilate then called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people,¹⁴ and said to them, "You brought me this man as one who was perverting the people; and after examining him before you, behold, I did not find this man guilty of any of your charges against him;¹⁵ neither did Herod, for he sent him back to us. Behold, nothing deserving death has been done by him;¹⁶ I will therefore chastise him and release him."

18 But they all cried out together, "Away with this man and release to us Barabbas"¹⁹—a man who had been thrown into prison for an insurrection started in the city, and for murder.²⁰ Pilate addressed them once more, desiring to release Jesus;²¹ but they shouted out, "Crucify, crucify him!"²² A third time he said to them, "Why, what evil has he done? I have found in him no crime deserving death; I will therefore chastise him and release him."²³ But they were urgent, demanding with loud cries that he should be crucified. And their voices prevailed.²⁴ So Pilate gave sentence that their demand should be granted.²⁵ He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, whom they asked for; but Jesus he delivered up to their will.

23:1-5 Pronounced an Insurrectionist: Matthew records the remorse of Judas (Mt. 27:3-10) in advance of its chronological order apparently so as not to interrupt his subsequent narrative of the trial before Pilate. Judas' regret (Gr. *metameletheis*, not *metanao* which means "repent"—see II Cor. 7:8-10 where these two words are shown in contrast) must have taken place after Pilate's ratification of the Sanhedrin's sentence because they had returned to their Hall of Hewn Stones (cf. Mt. 27:3). Most harmonies of the gospel accounts place Matthew's account of what Judas did *before* the Sanhedrin's trip to Pilate's judgment hall. There is a sorrow of the world that produces death—it is a remorse or regret without the decision to change. Repentance, on the other hand, is a sorrow that is climaxed by change. It is significant that the complete innocence of Jesus could have such impact on one who was so devoted to crass materialism. Certainly if the one who betrayed Him testifies to His innocence in such a manner, he was innocent.

Pilate's judgment seat was in the Tower of Antonia, the Roman army barracks just north of and attached to the Temple courts. Pilate's permanent residence was at Caesarea on the sea coast of Palestine. Pontius Pilate, it is alleged, was the son of Marcus Pontius, a general of the Roman army in Spain during Agrippa's war against the Cantabri. He was a friend of the famous royal prince Germanicus and married to Claudia Procula, granddaughter of Augustus the emperor (see our comments on Pilate at Lk. 3:1-6).

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To understand Pilate's behavior at the trial of Jesus, one must be aware of his former dealings with the Jews and the pressures he felt from the terrifying political inquisitions perpetrated by Tiberius Caesar in his later years. Pilate had a relatively "free hand" in ruling Judea, responsible directly to Tiberius. In Pilate was vested the power of life and death for all Roman provincials. He was both final judge and governor. The territory of Judea, being under the direct rule of a Roman procurator, was not allowed to execute capital punishment even on a Jewish citizen (cf. Josephus, *Antiquities* IX:1:1; Jn. 18:31). Pilate was in continual conflict with the Jews. Most procurators were. The Jews would not let them be otherwise. When Pilate first came to Palestine he wanted to abolish all Jewish laws and customs, but found this politically impossible. He brought effigies of Caesar to Jerusalem and set them up at night. When the Jews heard, they came by the hundreds and camped around his palace at Caesarea imploring him to remove them. He refused, called them to his judgment seat, surrounded them with an army in ambush, and threatened to kill them. They refused and threw themselves down on the pavement baring their necks to the sword. Pilate had to retreat. Another time he ordered an aqueduct to be built to improve Jerusalem's water supply and attempted to pay for it with Temple treasure. The Jews rioted, Pilate ordered them slain, but had to face continued hatred of the Jewish populace for having used "sacred" funds. Later, he ordered some Galileans slain as they were in the act of offering sacrifice (cf. Lk. 13:1) for some reason known only to him. This may have been the reason he and Herod Antipas were at odds with one another. Finally, about A.D. 36, a self-appointed prophet asserted that Moses' tabernacle and holy vessels were buried on Mt. Gerizim (in Samaria). A multitude of Jews, attempting to climb the hill and dig these alleged vessels up was slain by order of Pilate. Pilate was then called to Rome, banished, and, tradition says, he committed suicide near Vienne (Gaul). The relations between the Jews and Pilate were very strained. He detested them, and they hated him. The Jews were on the lookout for some cause to petition Tiberius Caesar for the removal of Pilate—and Pilate knew it. Only by yielding to the clamor of the Jews for the death of Jesus (30 A.D.) did he last until 36 A.D.

The *whole company* (Gr. *plethos*) of the Jewish council (not the "multitudes") rose as an official body and took Jesus before Pilate. The Sanhedrin began to *accuse* Jesus (Gr. *katagorein*, from which *categorize* originates) charging Him officially with a capital crime—insurrection. They said they had found (Gr. *heuromen*, to find by investigation) "this fellow" (Gr. *touton*) perverting the Jewish nation. The Greek word *diastrephonta* is translated "perverting" and means literally, "turning through." The accusation is that Jesus has been going throughout the nation subverting, twisting, distorting and corrupting people by the thousands, teaching them to resist Caesar's taxes and claiming himself to be a king. Pilate later uses

the word, *apostrophonta*, (23:14) which literally means, "Turning away" the people. Of course, Jesus was not guilty of the charge of forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar. In fact, He had advocated just the opposite (cf. Lk. 20:21-26). And, He was not guilty of the charge of claiming to be "king" in the way the Jews intended Pilate to understand it.

Pilate did not observe the full legal procedure carried out in the courts at Rome—he was not required to. But he did imitate it to a certain extent. He had full discretion in judgment. No Jew had the right of appeal to Caesar unless he was also a Roman citizen. Roman procurators were usually content for the provincials to govern themselves provided they did nothing to impinge upon the authority of Rome. Any conviction on a capital charge had to be referred to the Roman procurator for ratification or reversal. The Jewish council could condemn but not execute (cf. Josephus, *Ant.* IX:1:1; Jn. 18:31).

When Pilate accepted Jesus as a prisoner he did not do so as a court of appeal. Jesus made no appeal. Pilate was bound to review the proceedings themselves by which Jesus had already been tried and brought before him. And that was all Pilate was bound to do. The Jews would not enter the Praetorium (Gr. *praitorion*, lit. "general's tent" but later, "residence or judgment hall of the provincial governor") because they believed they would be "defiled" (Jn. 18:28). It appears Pilate, by his question about "accusation" (Jn. 18:29) was going to try the case in due form of law and for some undisclosed reason the Jews had not expected him to adopt this attitude (Jn. 18:30). They act as if they had reason to suppose Pilate knew quite well why they had brought Jesus before him. They apparently thought Pilate would just do what they wanted him to do with the prisoner, assuming they had already found Him guilty! Pilate either guessed, or had advanced information, that Jesus' Jewish trial was a farce. We are told later that Pilate knew the Jews had delivered Jesus "for envy" (Mt. 27:16). Pilate evidently saw an opportunity to agitate, belittle and "get back" at these Jewish hypocrites. Realizing Pilate was going to insist on a formal trial, the Jewish rulers began to accuse Jesus of perverting their nation in a tax revolt against Rome and making Himself a king. These accusations were lies. These rulers knew Jesus had never done any of them. They are accusing Him of what was the desire of their own hearts. The Jewish refusal to pay tribute to Caesar a few years after Jesus' death is what precipitated the conflict ending in the destruction of Judaism (70 A.D.).

The charge of sedition made, Pilate's next step was to interrogate the prisoner (Mt. 27:11; Mk. 15:2; Lk. 23:3; Jn. 18:33). He began by asking, "Are you king of the Jews?" John tells us Jesus first answered by asking Pilate, "Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?" (Jn. 18:34). In other words, "In what sense do you use the word 'king'?—as a Roman official trying to decide whether I claim to be

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an earthly king in opposition to Caesar? Or, are you merely repeating a question put into your mouth by my Jewish countrymen who know quite well that I do not claim to be that sort of king?" Pilate replies: "I am repeating the charge of your country-men (Jn. 18:35). You and they are Jews. You must know in what sense they use the term king and you will know what they mean better than I—what then have you done, exactly?"

Jesus did not back away. He said, "My kingship is not of this world. . . ." He asserted that He did have a kingship in the sense in which He had often made the claim to Messiahship. But He would have Pilate understand that His kingship was not of this world (cf. Jn. 18:36). He made no claim to any worldly throne as the Jewish council had accused Him. Jesus said, in effect, "I am not guilty of sedition against Rome's political sovereignty."

Pilate again said, "So you are a king?" Luke and the other Synoptics record Jesus' second answer, "You have said so." Modern speech would translate that into, "You have it correct, I am the Messiah of the Jews." John records the additional statement of Jesus here, "For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice," (Jn. 18:37). Pilate's soliloquy, "What is truth?" was not said flippantly—he was wrestling with his conscience. He had a premonition where this would eventually come to a head. Eventually he would have to decide either to release this idealistic, but innocent, Jewish rabbi and incur the wrath of these detestable rulers, or give in and execute Him. Truth is justice in action. Pilate knew that. Everyone knows that by instinct or conscience. Pilate also knew he had better make no political blunders with Tiberius on the throne in Rome. So, while he was being pressed by his conscience to act justly and truthfully, and with the desire to get "one up" on these antagonists of his, the Jews, and considering the practical consequences of what he would do, he philosophized on, "What is truth?" He probably asked the question to himself as much as to anyone else. The more he reflected on this question and the more he thought about Jesus, the more he was convinced that Jesus was not guilty of sedition or political rebellion against Rome.

Pilate said to the chief priests and the multitudes (Lk. 23:4), "I find no crime in this man." The Greek word *aition* is strictly a legal term meaning, "a crime, a legal ground for punishment." It was clearly a verdict in the judicial sense of "not guilty." Here, the trial should have been over. The highest tribunal in the land at that point had spoken. The prisoner should have been freed.

The verdict of Pilate sent the Jews into a fit of rage. Luke uses the Greek verb *epischuo* which means literally, "intensely strong" to describe their reaction. Mark says at that point the chief priests "accused him of many things" (Mk. 15:3) and Pilate asked him, "Have you no answer to make? See how many charges they bring against you?" But Jesus said nothing more to Pilate not even answering one of the charges. Pilate was amazed.

23:6-12 Perverse Interrogation: Amid the shouting and tumult of the accusations of the Jews against Jesus, Pilate overheard the cry that the prisoner had been teaching in Galilee. This gave Pilate an idea. He inquired whether Jesus were a Galilean. Pilate and Herod (tetrarch of Galilee) had been political enemies for some time. Each had probably tried to court the favor of Rome by slandering the other concerning their administration of assigned portions of Palestine. Pilate did not want to intensify the estrangement and saw at once an opportunity, since this prisoner was a Galilean, to appease Herod and express his contempt for the Jewish rulers in one stroke. He would send the prisoner to Herod as a gesture of political courtesy. Herod was in Jerusalem at that moment having come to observe the Passover.

Herod had been wanting to see Jesus to make sure He was not John the Baptist returned from the dead (cf. Lk. 9:7-9). Herod knew he had blundered in the execution of John the Baptist—the deed had intensified the hatred of the populace against him; it alerted Rome to his ineffectiveness; it bothered his conscience. Rome would depose him, and he knew it, if he should blunder in public favor again like he had with John the Baptist. So Herod intended to play this one “close to his vest.” He would not plunge into this without thinking. Herod besought Jesus to do some “sign” for him. Apparently Herod, too, recognized that Jesus posed no real political threat or he would have found some way to condemn Jesus to execution. Since Jesus presented no political problem, Herod decided he would not make trouble for himself where there was none. All he intended was to amuse himself with some “signs” from the Galilean prophet, talk with Him about His teachings, and send Him back to Pilate. But Jesus would do no signs nor would He talk. Herod was the “pig” and “dog” of Matthew 7:6. He wanted to see the power of the miraculous and hear about Jesus’ teachings only for carnal reasons. He wanted to be amused. He wanted to exploit Jesus, not learn from Him for any righteous reasons.

Luke alone records the details of Herod’s interrogation. Jesus’ refusal to speak to Herod shocks our sensibilities at first. It seems too out of character for Jesus to pass up an opportunity to speak to the worst of sinners about his soul. Apparently Jesus was manifesting for the record that Herod had evidence enough and teaching enough to which he might respond to God’s will should he choose to do so. Jesus’ silence is saying that any further discussion with Herod about spiritual matters would be to no avail until Herod should repent in accordance with the truth he already had. Those who have no love for the truth, but take pleasure in unrighteousness will be allowed to continue in their self-chosen delusion (II Thess. 2:10-12, etc.). Herod is the one person in all the New Testament Jesus refused to talk with. He talked with Pilate and Judas, but not with Herod.

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All the time Herod was trying to get Jesus to answer his questions, the chief priests and the scribes stood by, *vehemently* (Gr. *eutonos*, lit. "well-stretched" or "extending") accusing Jesus. They were raging beyond all boundaries of propriety for "spiritual leaders" and "judges" of the nation. Herod would not allow himself to be trapped into another *faux pas*. He refused to be swayed by the Jewish priests and pronounced no sentence. Herod was the craftier of the two governors. He ridiculed Jesus as a "nobody" and sent Him back to Pilate—perhaps with a written note of conciliation. But Herod did display his perverse and wicked mentality. When Jesus would not satisfy his curiosity with a "sign" or a word, Herod had Him mocked and physically abused. Herod and Pilate became friends (Gr. *philoï*, sometimes translated "lovers") from that very day.

23:13-25 Proclaimed Innocent: Pilate did initially what his conscience told him was right. He called together the chief priests and the rulers of the Jews and the people. He told them he had *examined* (Gr. *anakrinās*, a legal term denoting the preliminary investigation for gathering evidence for the information of the judges) Jesus and *indeed* (Gr. *kai idou*, lit. "and behold") had found Him *not guilty of any* of the charges they had brought against Him. *Eight times* Pilate would insist Jesus was innocent:

- a. John 18:38, before He sent Jesus to Herod.
- b. Luke 23:15, immediately after Jesus' return from Herod.
- c. Luke 23:20, again he tried to release Jesus.
- d. Luke 23:22, Pilate said again he found no crime in Jesus, and offered to "chastise" Jesus and release Him.
- e. John 19:4, *after* Pilate had scourged Jesus.
- f. John 19:6, when Pilate said, "Take Him yourselves and crucify him, I find no crime in him."
- g. John 19:12, after Jesus warned Pilate of his sin, Pilate again sought to release Him.
- h. Matthew 27:24, Pilate tried to convince himself he had released Jesus and was free of the criminal actions of the Jews.

Pilate also insisted to the Jews that Herod found Jesus innocent of their charges against Him.

No matter how much Pilate implored, the Jewish rulers were implacable. They would not listen to reason; they threw caution to the wind and shouted down the Roman procurator. Pilate had to find an alternative. Suddenly he thought of the Roman custom of releasing a prisoner (cf. Mt. 27:15; Mk. 15:6; Jn. 18:39) (probably a political prisoner) on festival days in the provinces. Some say Pilate was following the normal practice by offering the Jews the choice between Jesus and Bar-Abbas; not really! Matthew (27:15) says the usual custom was to let the provincials choose "whom they wanted." Pilate offered them only one alternative—Jesus or Bar-Abbas.

Pilate capitulated! All jurisprudence has been abrogated. Pilate did not insist on law. He found a way to compromise, but it was a capitulation of principle. He hoped the Jews had rather have the harmless Jesus loosed than a murdering, thieving insurrectionist and troublemaker like Bar-Abbas. About that time Pilate's attention was diverted by a note from his wife. This gave the Jewish rulers an opportunity to stir up the crowd to cry out for Bar-Abbas, (see Mt. 27:19-20). After reading his wife's note he asked again for their choice—they cried again, "Bar-Abbas!" As for the one who called himself, "Christ," they cried, "Crucify him!" Pilate insisted a third time that Jesus was innocent (Lk. 23:18-22). He then compounded his compromise and offered to chastise Jesus.

The name Bar-Abbas means, "son of the father." That may be, as G. Campbell Morgan notes, a title rather than a name. Peter's name was Simon, but he was titled, Bar-Jonah, "son of Jonah." Matthew and Mark say the insurrectionist the Jews asked to be released in place of Jesus was simply a "man" "called" Bar-Abbas. This "man" may have given himself the title, "son of the father," claiming to be the Messiah. From the time of the Hasmonean family until long past the time of Jesus many false Messiah's arose seducing some of the Jews to follow them. Bar-Abbas was not a common criminal—he was a political radical, a terrorist, who had attempted to overthrow the Roman rule of Palestine. He had been captured and imprisoned and awaited execution. Pilate, cagily, left them with only a choice between a man who had tried, by force, to set up an earthly Jewish kingdom (Bar-Abbas) or a man who claimed to be the only true Messiah but who maintained the kingdom was a spiritual relationship to God by faith and that it could exist in this world even under Roman political rule. The Jews, in demanding the release of Bar-Abbas and the crucifixion of Jesus, manifested their carnal expectations concerning God's kingdom.

Once he compromised justice by not releasing the innocent prisoner, Pilate feels like he must continue in the course at all costs. Actually, Pilate could have freed Jesus at any time. All he had to do was say the word—and suffer the consequences. When his first compromise did not work, he tried another. He offers to "chastise" Jesus and then let him go. He hoped scourging Jesus would placate the emotions of the mob. The Greek word for *chastise* is *paideusas* from the root word which means "child." The word means literally, "instruct, correct, discipline." Sometimes the "chastising" was used to "cross-examine" a defendant to see if he was telling the truth or not. Sometimes it was used as a form of punishment for one found guilty of a crime to "correct" the wrongdoer. Pilate wanted to subject Jesus to this last-resort form of "cross-examination" hoping it would convince the Jews once for all that He was innocent.

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The Roman scourge was a whip with several thongs, each loaded with acorn shaped balls of lead, or sharp pieces of bone or spikes. Stripped of his clothes, his hands tied to a column or a stake, with his back bent, the victim was lashed with these whips by six soldiers. Each stroke cut into the flesh until the veins and sometimes the intestines were laid bare. Often the whips struck the victims face knocking out eyes and teeth. It sometimes ended in death.

John's gospel tells us that at this moment Pilate took Jesus (into the procurator's judgment hall) and scourged him (Jn. 19:1-12). Pilate then brought Jesus out before the Jews and made his famous statement, "Ecce homo" ("Behold, the man"). Three more times here he tried to proclaim Jesus innocent and release Him. The third time the Jews cried out, "If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend; everyone who makes himself a king sets himself against Caesar" (Jn. 19:12). Luke simply says, "And their voices prevailed" (Lk. 23:23). Indeed, their implied threat to represent Pilate as an enemy of Caesar prevailed over the voice of conscience in Pilate's heart. Up to this point he kept trying every way he knew to release Jesus and placate the Jews at the same time. But now it is Pilate's neck or Jesus'! So at 6 a.m. Friday morning, Nisan 15, 30 A.D., Pilate said to the Jews, "Here is your king" (Jn. 19:14). But the Jews shouted all the more, that he should be crucified. Pilate said, "Shall I crucify your king?" But the chief priests, not being altogether truthful, said, "We have no king but Caesar" (Jn. 19:14). Pilate saw that he was not going to get by without ordering Jesus crucified—the Jewish mob looked like it was about to riot. He took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves" (Mt. 27:24-25). The mob shouted back, "His blood be on us and on our children" (Mt. 27:25). Pilate gave official (Gr. *epekrine*) "sentence" that their demand (crucifixion) should be granted. He released Bar-Abbas and gave Jesus up to their will (Gr. *thelemati*). Crucifixion was exclusively a Roman method of executing criminals. The Jewish method of execution was death by stoning. Jews considered any one crucified ("hanged on a tree") to be cursed (Gal. 3:13). They *specifically* wanted Jesus to be crucified. Such an execution would imply innocence on their part in His death and it would infer that Jesus was "cursed." Little did they know that this was God's plan for Jesus—to become a "curse" for the whole world (Gal. 3:13; II Cor. 5:21).

We would expect Jesus to be the central figure at the trials. But the more we look at the narrative, the more we are impressed with the fact that Pilate and the Jewish rulers are the focus—at least on the surface. That is because it is not really Jesus who is on trial—it is mankind represented in Pilate and the Jews. Men are "in the docks," not the Son of man. He is innocent. What they do with Absolute Innocence incriminates them!

SECTION 2

Impaled (23:26-49)

26 And as they led him away, they seized one Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and laid on him the cross, to carry it behind Jesus. ²⁷And there followed him a great multitude of the people, and of women who bewailed and lamented him. ²⁸But Jesus turning to them said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. ²⁹For behold, the days are coming when they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never gave suck!' ³⁰Then they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us'; and to the hills, 'Cover us.' ³¹For if they do this when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?"

³²Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. ³³And when they came to the place which is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on the right and one on the left. ³⁴And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." And they cast lots to divide his garments. ³⁵And the people stood by, watching; but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!" ³⁶The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him vinegar, ³⁷and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" ³⁸There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews."

³⁹One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" ⁴⁰But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? ⁴¹And we indeed justly; for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." ⁴²And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." ⁴³And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

⁴⁴It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, ⁴⁵while the sun's light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. ⁴⁶Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit!" And having said this he breathed his last. ⁴⁷Now when the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God, and said, "Certainly this man was innocent!" ⁴⁸And all the multitudes who assembled to see the sight, when they saw what had taken place, returned home beating their breasts. ⁴⁹And all his acquaintances and the women who had followed him from Galilee stood at a distance and saw these things.

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23:26-31 Empathy: As soon as Pilate turned Jesus over to the Jews with an official edict to have Him crucified, Pilate's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium, called the small band on duty together, stripped His clothes off, put a scarlet robe on him, jammed a plaited crown of thorns down on His head, put a reed in His right hand, and kneeled before Him, mocking Him with the words, "Hail, King of the Jews" (Mt. 27:27-31; Mk. 15:16-20). They spat upon Him and struck Him in the head with a reed. Spitting in a person's face indicated gross contempt (Num. 12:14; Deut. 25:9; Job 30:10; Isa. 50:6; Mt. 26:67; 27:30), and when performed by an "unclean" person it produced defilement (Lev. 15:8). This psychologically demeaning and abusive experience, following the mock trials and the scourging constituted a terrible prelude to the excruciating spiritual struggle and physical torture of the cross.

As they led Him away to be crucified, they seized a bystander by the name of Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country and laid on him the cross to carry it behind Jesus. Jesus probably bore the cross Himself until they neared the gate in the northern wall of the city. It was Roman practice to make the accused bear a 300 pound cross to the place of execution. The accused usually wore a sign announcing his crime. As the accused proceeded through the city bearing his cross he was often flogged by Roman whips and pelted with rocks and other missiles from the gaping multitudes along the way to execution. Apparently Jesus was going too slowly or He may have fallen under its weight. The latter would be more likely when one considers the devastating tortures He endured for hours and hours prior to this experience. The man pressed into service to carry His cross was from North Africa (Cyrene) but he was evidently a Jew (named, Simon). Alexander and Rufus were his sons and probably Christians (Rom. 16:13). Simon may have later become a Christian himself. A scene as this would call forth the natural tender-sympathies of women.

These were women of Judea or Jerusalem—not of Galilee. They were wailing out of pure feminine pity and empathy for Him. The wells of human pity almost always overflow the feminine heart in the presence of suffering. But, almost incredibly, Jesus warned them, "Do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and your children." He was not spitefully slighting their sympathy but He knew that His death was going to result in something even more terrible for Jerusalem and its inhabitants (cf. Lk. 19:41-44; 21:3-32). He is repeating, in capsule form, what He had already announced—the doom of Jerusalem and Judaism. The Romans will crucify Jesus (at the insistence of the Jews) who is The Green Wood but which will *not* be consumed because there is no real crime in Him. The Romans will *destroy* the Jewish nation which is The Dry Wood because it is guilty of killing the Son of God. The time will come to these wailing Jewish women when they will wish they had not borne any children.

Evidently these Jewish women were not believers—only sympathizers. They weiled because they took pity on His fleshly torture. His physical weakness is all they saw, however. They had not seen His deity. May we suggest that we too may be overly inclined to show pity only for the physical torture Jesus had to endure and may miss focusing our contrition in the right place. What we should lament is our sin and the injustice of the perfect Son of man having to be “made sin on our behalf.” If we come to the cross and pity His physical suffering primarily, we have not really grasped the deepest truth concerning His sorrow. As G. Campbell Morgan said: “In the last analysis, Jesus is never an object of pity on the part of sinful, condemned humanity. He is the Object of wonder and of true worship, as He is seen moving in regal splendor towards His Cross.” It is nothing short of awesome that Jesus, in these hours of severest psychological and physical torture, could take time to show concern and deep sympathy for the Jewish nation and warn them once more of the heinousness of their evil. These are the only words He spoke between Pilate’s judgment and the cross!

23:32-34 Execution: Now Luke tells the story of the crucifixion. Along with the other gospel writers he states the facts with incredible brevity! This brevity is for a purpose. Had the gospel writers gone into great detail about the physical aspects of the crucifixion, it would only have intensified the human inclination to concentrate on the physical and miss the spiritual.

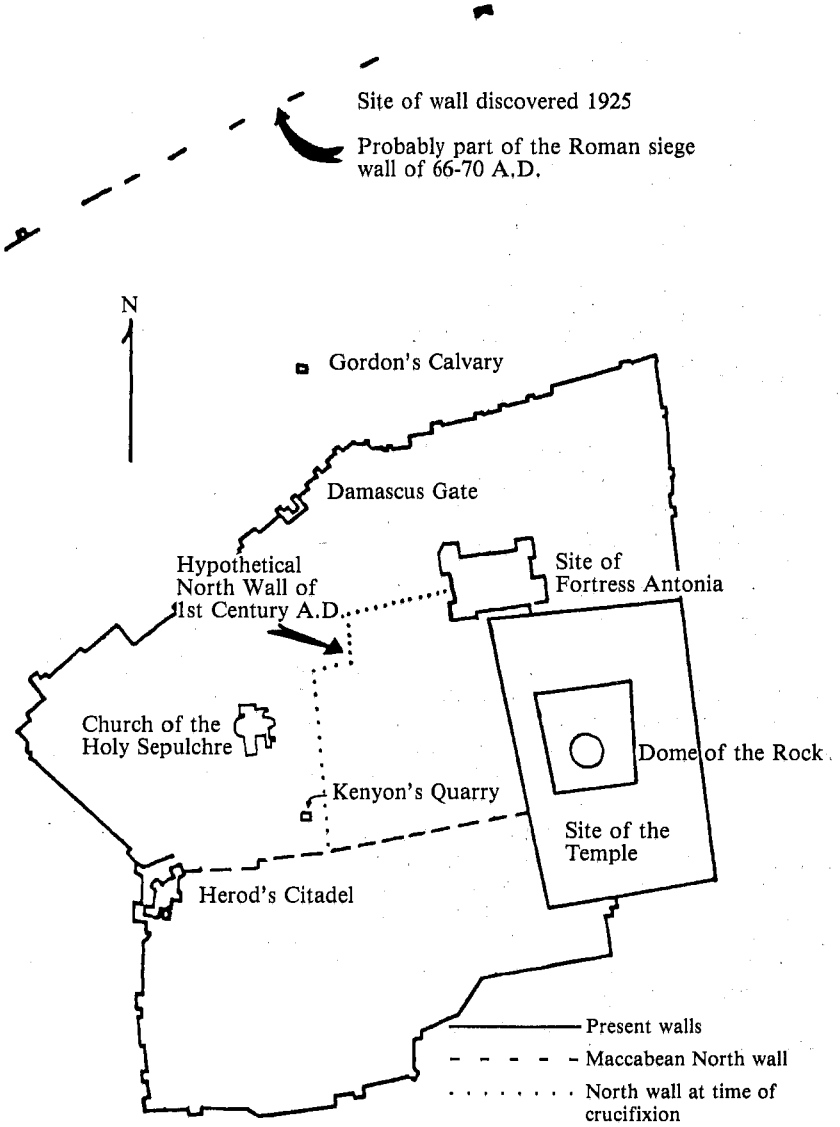
They took Jesus out, His only companions were two criminals (Gr. *kakourgos*, lit. “evil-workers”), and proceeded to a place called, “The Skull.” Matthew and Mark call it in Greek, *Golgothan*, (Mt. 27:33; Mk. 15:22) which is a transliteration of the Hebrew word, *gulegoleth*. The Hebrew word means, “bald, round, skull-like mound or hill.” Luke calls it in Greek, *kranion*, which is simply, “Skull.” The KJV in Lk. 23:33 follows the Latin Vulgate and translates, *Calvary*. The Latin word *calvaria* is a rendering of the Greek *kranion*, both of which mean “skull.” A fourth century tradition says Golgotha was where the Church of The Holy Sepulchre now stands (within the city walls at Jerusalem). The more likely site is “Gordon’s Calvary” discovered in 1849, a few hundred feet northeast of the Damascus Gate—sometimes known as the “Green Hill” (outside the ancient walls of Jerusalem). Hebrews 13:12 may indicate (unless it is to be interpreted symbolically) Jesus was put to death “outside” the city. The traditional site for Golgotha was for many years associated with the Church of the Holy Sepulchre marking the spot where Constantine, in dismantling a pagan temple, allegedly found the sepulchre where Christ had been buried. Constantine’s mother, Queen Helena built a Christian church there in 326-330 A.D. Recently, Miss Kenyon, an archaeologist, discovered the ruins of an ancient stone quarry near the Church. The quarry could be dated from 700 B.C. to sometime after 70 A.D. Some have theorized,

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that a quarry would necessarily be outside the ancient city walls and, therefore, the location of ancient Golgotha may very well have been near where the Church is now (see map on page 471). We prefer Gordon's "Calvary" because of the following reasons:

- a. The place of executing, both with the Romans and the Jews was customarily outside the city or camp (Palutius, a Roman general wrote of this in his *Military Glories*, 2:4:6; see also Deut. 17:5; I Ki. 21:13; Acts 7:58; Heb. 13:12; Lev. 24:14; Num. 15:36).
- b. John 19:20 says the place where Jesus was crucified was "near the city . . ." and apparently where passers-by would be able to see clearly the spectacle . . . even those afar off (Mk. 15:40).
- c. Gordon's Calvary is only a few hundred feet northeast of the Damascus Gate.
- d. Prevailing archaeological opinion is that the wall of Jerusalem is now just where it was in Jesus' day.
- e. There is only one place around Jerusalem which has borne, and still bears, the name "Skull Hill," that is Gordon's Calvary.
- f. Gordon's Calvary is near where the Tower of Antonia was (Pilate's judgment hall) and Gordon's Calvary would appear to be the most readily accessible place (away from crowded streets of the city) to carry on the act of crucifixion.

The origin of crucifixion as a method of execution may be traced to the Phoenician, Carthaginian, Persian and Median civilizations. Syrians and Greeks also used this barbaric instrument of death. The Romans adopted the practice because of the unparalleled suffering it inflicted and the spectacle it presented. It was inflicted on vicious criminals and slaves. It proved to be an effective deterrent to widespread crime or sedition. A Roman citizen could choose execution other than by crucifixion. The Jews would impale a *dead* man to signify a curse upon him (Gal. 3:13; Deut. 21:22-23) but never would they execute anyone by crucifixion. Their profound hatred of Jesus is intensely revealed in their cry, "Crucify him!" An article in *Time* magazine, January 18, 1971, brought to light some new and important information on the method of crucifixion by the Romans. In June 1968, thirty-five human skeletons were found by archaeologists in Israel dating back to the first century A.D. near the old Damascus Gate of Jerusalem. Among them the skeleton of a young adult male whose name, Yehohanan (John, in Aramaic), was inscribed on a burial ossuary. The man's heel bones were penetrated by the rusty remains of a seven-inch long nail. The nail had been bent by trying to force it into a knot. The only way to get the body down from its cross was to cut its feet off and remove the entire complex—piece of wood, nail, feet and the rest of the body—for burial.



See article "Where Did Jesus Die?" by Wm. Palmer in *Christian Standard* 3-19-78.

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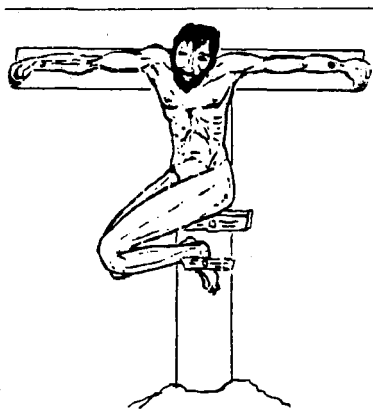
This is the first firm physical evidence of an actual crucifixion in the ancient Mediterranean world. It is very significant because: It tends to revise classical artist's concepts of the manner of crucifixion.

The crucified Jesus is usually shown in an erect position, fastened to the cross by nails driven through hands and feet. To some scholars, that interpretation seemed highly implausible. With the bulk of the victim's weight suspended from his hands, his body would sag; it would become extremely difficult for the breathing muscles to operate, and death would follow rapidly. The delicacy of the hand-structure would also tend to tear and come loose from the nails supporting all the body weight.

According to a reconstruction of Yehohanan's crucifixion by Nicu Haas, anatomist and archaeologist, the nails were driven through the forearms to provide greater support. The victim's legs were twisted to one side and folded up, then a nail and a piece of wood forming a cleat were nailed into his feet near the heel bone. This unnatural position served the purpose of the executioners very well: it would have prolonged both the victim's life and his agony. Incidentally, Yehohanan's skeleton gave evidence that the traditional *coup de grace* (a blow breaking both legs to hasten the victim's death by hemorrhage and shock) had been administered.

Usually an anesthesia was given to the victim of crucifixion, a mixture of wine and myrrh (Gr. *smurna*, a gum-resin from a tree which grows in Yemen—an astringent, antiseptic and stimulant) and also mixed in with this was "gall" (Gr. *chole*, which some think may have been a small dosage of reptilian venom). But Jesus refused to be anesthetized! He was determined to drink the "cup" of God's wrath upon sin to the full, (see Mt. 27:34; Mk. 15:23).

With cold-blooded detachment the Romans would securely fasten the mutilated body to the cross. The ringing hammer against nail, mingled with shrieks of pain (from many other victims) produced a chilling sensation in the bystanders. With a dull thud and more screams from the victim the cross would be dropped into a hole with the victim nailed to the wood, suspended between earth and sky. All that remained was the wait for death. The pain of tearing flesh and muscle cramps became unbearable. Many victims fainted, revived, and fainted again, often, before death. Severe inflammation of open wounds from scourging and the nails occurred.



Exposure to the elements of heat and cold (at night); rain and sunshine; insects and birds pecking at the helpless victims, created agony beyond comprehension. The arteries of the head and stomach were surcharged with blood creating excruciating headaches and stomach cramps plus psychological trauma. Tetanus with attendant convulsions often set in. Death rarely came before thirty-six hours elapsed. Nine days is the longest record of torturous endurance on a cross. This form of execution engulfed the victim not only with pain, but with moral reproach and public humiliation!

It was 9:00 a.m. in the morning (Mark 15:25 calls it "the third hour") when Jesus was nailed to the cross. Placing Jesus between two thieves was intended to humiliate Him further. All manner of derisive, abusive and mocking taunts were probably being hurled at Jesus as He was being nailed to the timbers. There was not one sympathetic, helpful word or touch until the word of one of the thieves. Of course, His mother, other women and John the apostle were there, but they were not allowed near Him. And what was Jesus doing as the Roman soldiers were driving the spikes into His hands and feet? He was praying for the "forgiveness" of His executioners. The Greek verb *aphes* is in the imperfect tense meaning Jesus kept on saying, "Father suffer them (or, wait for them) for they know not what they are doing" Lk. 23:34. This is the *first* "word from the cross"—there will be six others. Luke records three of the seven words from the cross, John records three, and Matthew and Mark record the other one. These words are precious revelations of what was passing through the mind of our Savior in these final hours.

The Greek word *aphes* ("forgive") is the same word used in Mt. 19:14, *aphete*, where it is translated "suffer" or "allow," and in Mt. 27:49 where it is translated "wait." Jesus was *not* asking God for blanket forgiveness here, nor was He praying for the immediate forgiveness of His executioners without their repentance. No where in the scriptures is such a doctrine taught. What Jesus was praying was that God would "wait" with divine forbearance, put off His wrath upon these who were unaware of their heinous crime, until they might have an opportunity to respond to a better knowledge of what they had done. These Roman soldiers were under military orders, carrying out an assignment given them by their superiors. They would assume Jesus to be guilty, unless they were privy to Pilate's statements to the Jews. Paul says if the rulers had known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory (I Cor. 2:8). Peter said the same thing in Acts 3:17. But *now* God commands all men everywhere to repent—and He has given assurance by raising Jesus from the dead (Acts 17:30-31). After Jesus' resurrection these executioners, and all men everywhere (Col. 1:23), *did* have an opportunity to know for Paul said the gospel was preached to the whole world in his lifetime. At that time they must respond in repentance and obedience to covenant terms (immersion in water) to

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have the forgiveness Christ prayed they *might have opportunity* to choose. No man should take sin lightly. Jesus was not praying for indiscriminate forgiveness or universal salvation. Jesus was pleading for *time* for men who had no opportunity to know of Him as the vindicated, validated Lord of glory.

Pilate had written a placard with the title, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews," (cf. Jn. 19:18-22). It was written in the three main languages spoken or read then, Hebrew, Latin and Greek. Pilate probably did it more to express his contempt and spite toward the Jewish rulers than for anything else. It may have been for the sake of the Roman official records since "blasphemy" of a *foreign* god would not be a capital crime by Roman law. The Jews objected but Pilate said it would remain that way, so the soldiers nailed the sign to the cross. Next, the soldiers divided His garments (plural). He probably wore a turban, a cape or cloak, a girdle or belt, sandals and the under-garments. They divided these among themselves and decided to "cast lots" for the seamless tunic (cf. Jn. 19:23-25) which was of extra-ordinary workmanship. This action was foreknown by God and predicted about a thousand years before it occurred (cf. Ps. 22:18).

23:35-39 Excoriation: The people stood by watching. The extreme cruelty of crucifixion often left those who witnessed it in speechless shock. The Jewish rulers, however, were so filled with raging malice they were impervious to the inhumanity of it all and scoffed as they heaped verbal abuses upon Jesus. Matthew says they cried blasphemous words (Gr. *eblasphemoun*, "derided") at Jesus (Mt. 27:39), wagging their heads or nodding in the direction of the cross as if sneering at this end for the alleged Messiah. Their taunt, "He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One," was a verbal reinforcement of their disbelief and maliciousness. The soldiers "mocked" (Gr. *enepaizon*, "to play like a child, to sport or jest with") Jesus and so did the Jewish rulers (Mt. 27:41; Mk. 15:31). The rulers affirmed their opinion that God wanted nothing to do with Jesus by saying, "He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him; for he said, I am the Son of God" (Mt. 27:43). One of the saddest spectacles about Jesus' crucifixion was the conduct of those around the cross. Rather than sit in silence and think or observe, they circled and paced about, spilling out venomous spite and hate like wild animals ("bulls," Ps. 22:12) circling around a wounded and dying prey. Note the admission of the rulers in their statement, "He saved others . . ." that Jesus had done miracles. Perhaps they were remembering the resurrection of Lazarus. Would they have believed had Jesus come down from the cross? Did they believe the miracles they admitted He did? Did they believe after He arose from the dead? Some did (Acts 6:7)!

Matthew and Mark indicate that *both* the thieves started reviling Jesus (Mt. 27:44; Mk. 15:32). Luke mentions the one because the other repented.

Perhaps the thieves felt they were dying before their time and Jesus was the cause—they were undoubtedly crucified with Jesus to bring additional shame upon Him. The one thief said much the same as the rulers, If you are the Christ as you allege, save yourself and us from this excruciating death. His concept of the Christ was carnal too. Luke uses the Greek word *eblasphemei* to describe the thief's railing at Jesus, Lk. 23:39.

23:40-43 Exaltation: Suddenly, one of the thieves began to rebuke the other, "Do you not fear God!" Then he began to confess his sin, ". . . we indeed justly; for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds. . . ." He then added his belief of Jesus' innocence, saying, "but this man has done nothing wrong." He repented, or changed his mind and actions, from that of blaspheming Jesus to asking for His help. The thief believed Jesus was going to somehow fulfill His claim of Messiahship and "come into His kingdom." He surely did not think Jesus would survive death on the cross, so he must have believed in some kind of spiritual or other-worldly kingdom. Jesus would have welcomed such faith in the multitudes to whom He preached so often and so intently. But how could this thief have come to such conclusions about Jesus?

- a. John the Baptist's preaching was *widely* known and heard.
- b. Jesus' teachings and miracles were even *more widely* known and talked about.
- c. If the thief was a Jew, he probably knew something of Old Testament prophecies and rabbinic traditions.
- d. Both these thieves may have heard about the things said at Jesus' trials, or they may have been onlookers at the trials.
- e. The one thief was impressed with the divine behavior of Jesus at His crucifixion like the Roman soldier was.

At that moment Jesus spoke His *second* utterance from the cross: "Today, you will be with me in Paradise" (Lk. 23:43). The word *paradeiso* is the Greek translation of a Persian word which originally meant "garden" or "park." It is found only three times in the New Testament (Lk. 23:43; II Cor. 12:4; Rev. 2:7). There is a Hebrew word, *parades*, in Song of Solomon 4:13; Neh. 2:8; Eccl. 2:5 translated *forest* or *orchard*. In Jewish apocrypha the word is used extensively to denote the place of happiness to be inherited by the righteous. Jesus used the word only once. When Jesus spoke to the thief it was no time to use "theological" words so He used a word of the vernacular, "Paradise." No human being knows the location of Paradise—but wherever Jesus went *that very day*, this thief was with Him, (cf. also Phil. 1:21-23; Lk. 16:19-31). The question arises, how could this thief be saved without being baptized?

- a. Obviously Jesus could give salvation to anyone on any terms He wished so long as His last will and testament had not been probated by His death (cf. Heb. 9:16).

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- b. While a man still lives he has the right to dispense his possessions as he may see fit (cf. Mt. 9:2-8; Lk. 7:48). But after his death, his property must be dispensed according to the terms of his will (cf. Heb. 9:15-28).
- c. Christ's last will and testament was *probated* (from Latin, *probare*; "to prove or establish") on the Day of Pentecost, A.D. 30, when its divine authority was attested to by His resurrection and subsequent miracles of the Holy Spirit. On that day the Lord's executors gave the terms of Christ's will—"repent and be immersed, everyone of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of your sins . . ." (Acts 2:38).
- d. Since that time, everyone who wishes to be in Paradise with Christ must obey the terms of His probated will!

23:44-49 Exclamation: John records the third utterance from the cross: "Woman, behold your son!" (the apostle, John); and, "Behold your mother!" (Jn. 19:25-27). Four women; Mary, Jesus' mother; Mary Magdalene; Mary, mother of James and Joseph (also wife of Clopas); and Salome, mother of the sons of Zebedee (James and John) (also Jesus' aunt); and John, the beloved apostle, stood with the crowd around the cross. It was blazing noon-day (Luke calls it, "the sixth hour"); Jesus had been on the cross three hours. Now is fulfilled Simeon's prediction (Lk. 2:35), "a sword will pierce your (Mary, the mother) heart also." Jesus is Mary's Lord, to be sure, but just now He is her son, the baby who lay upon her breast long ago, the lad of Nazareth, the good, true, holy boy who grew into manhood under her loving eyes. From that hour John the apostle took Mary into his home (Jn. 19:27).

Luke (as well as Matthew and Mark) document for us the fact that there was an unnatural darkness, at midday, over the whole land, which lasted for three hours. Luke, according to the Nestle text, used the Greek word, *eklipontos*, from which the English word *eclipse* comes, to describe this darkness. It was, however, no natural eclipse because it was "full-moon" time (being Passover time). This was a miraculous *darkness* (Gr. *skotos*, the word which all three of the Synoptics use to describe the phenomenon). The darkness probably did not cover the whole earth. One pagan historian, however, does discuss it. Phlegon, Roman astronomer, speaking of the fourteenth year of the reign of Tiberius (29-30 A.D.) says, ". . . the greatest eclipse of the sun that was ever known happened then, for the day was so turned into night that the stars appeared."

The supernatural rending of the veil of the Temple is recorded by Luke (23:45) here. Matthew and Mark (Mt. 27:51; Mk. 15:38) place it at the moment of Christ's death. A careful examination of Luke's account indicates he is making a summarization for he says that the darkness and the rending of the veil took place sometime, and Luke is not intending to

be exact, during the three hours from the sixth hour (noon) until the ninth hour (3:00 p.m.). The veil was apparently torn in two (from top to bottom, Mt. 27:51; Mk. 15:38) at the ninth hour when Jesus "breathed his last" (Mt. 27:50; Mk. 15:37; Lk. 23:46). This incident was very evidently a miracle. It was not caused by the earthquake because Matthew says that happened *after* the veil was rent (Mt. 27:51-53). Edersheim says this veil was 60 ft. long (that is six stories), 30 ft. wide, and the thickness of the palm of a man's hand (about 4-5 inches). It was a composite of 72 equal squares of material and took scores of priests to manipulate. Rabbinical literature tells of two veils in Herod's Temple, one before the doors into the Holy Place, and one before the entrance to the Holy of Holies. The one torn in two was undoubtedly the veil before the Holy of Holies. Hebrews 9:1-28 is clearly a reference to this historic event as symbolizing the spiritual reality that was accomplished at the death of Christ. This miracle, witnessed no doubt by many priests, may be part of the reason many priests became followers of Christ later (see Acts 6:7).

Between noon and 3:00 p.m. Jesus made four more utterances from the cross:

- a. "Eli, Eli, lama sa-bach-thani?" this is Aramaic meaning, "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (cf. Mt. 27:46; Mk. 15:34).
 1. It is the cry of God, Himself, on the cross coming into identification of Himself with the issue of the sin of man.
 2. God "interposed Himself" with an oath (Heb. 6:17) at the cross, and took man's place.
 3. It is God-man entering into the experience of both at the point where reconciliation must be achieved.
 4. It is the Incarnate God becoming His own *curse* upon sin and sinners (Gal. 3:13).
 5. It is Him who knew no sin, being made to be sin on our behalf (II Cor. 5:21).
 6. It is God being both Just and the Justifier of those who believe in Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:26).
 7. It is the cry of a soul at the uttermost of sin—separating the soul from its Creator. It is the cry of the agony of absolute estrangement from God and all its consequences.
 8. It is the cry of a soul at the uttermost of sorrow—sorrowing over its loss of identity because forsaken by God, the soul is *lost* even to itself!
 9. It is the cry of the soul in the presence of the Divine silence. God withdraws—darkness and silence like no one has ever experienced. It is the silence and withdrawal of Hell!
 10. It is a word from the lips of God. God is expressing from the

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- human lips of His Son the fact that the pains and penalties of human sin were His—He took them for us!
11. It was all the cries of all the doubts of all humanity at the seeming injustices and incongruities of life and death. "My God, why? . . ." Is there any answer? Yes! If Calvary raises these questions, Easter morning answers them! *God has not forsaken man!*
- b. "I thirst . . ." (Jn. 19:28)
1. Six hours of physical and psychological torture more severe than any person has ever known is what Jesus has endured thus far.
 2. His tongue probably was swollen, his lips parched and cracked, and his every nerve crying out for the relief of a cooling drink.
 3. Soldiers say that on the battlefield all other agony of torn bodies and severed limbs is forgotten in the agony that exceeds them all—that of thirst.
 4. And someone gave Him vinegar on a sponge, attached to a reed or a limb off an hyssop shrub.
 5. How could Jesus drink the wine-vinegar now after refusing the wine and myrrh at first. Vinegar alone (soured wine) has no anaesthetic value, and, now He has tasted to the full His primary "cup" and it is now "finished."
 6. He who is the "Water of Life" drank the bitter cup of sin for the whole world there so those who believe and obey Him may drink the sweet wine of victory and forgiveness.
- c. "It is finished" (Jn. 19:30).
1. He cried it with a loud voice. It was a shout of triumph, not of defeat.
 2. The Greek word is *tetelestai*, a perfect tense verb meaning, "It has been brought to fulfillment with a continuing result of fulfillment." In other words, what Jesus completed on the cross will continue to stand as completed. It will never need to be completed again! (cf. Heb. 9:25-28; 10:12-14, etc.).
 3. The word of God for the redemption of mankind—so far as the Son's part was concerned—was completed.
 4. All the types, symbols and prophecies of the Old Testament pointed to this moment (Dan. 9:24-27; Isa. 53:1-12; Zech. 13:1ff)
—FINISHED!

Luke alone records the last utterance from the cross (Lk. 23:46): "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit!" The Greek verb, *parathesomai*, is the same word as its noun form in II Tim. 1:12 where Paul says he is persuaded God is able to keep that which he has "committed" to Him. It is a word which means "deposited with" or "entrusted with." Matthew says

Jesus cried again with a loud voice and “yielded up” His spirit. Matthew uses *apheken*, a Greek word which means Jesus “released, delivered, dismissed or yielded up or let go” His spirit. Jesus finished His work in the earthly body given Him (see Heb. 10:5-10), dismissed His spirit, and deposited it, along with His redemptive work, with the Father for safe-keeping and use as the Father intended it. Jesus was in control all the way. He did not release His spirit until “it was finished.” He was King. No man took His life—He gave it! Matthew records (Mt. 27:51-53) that when Jesus breathed His last, the veil of the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom; the earth shook, and the rocks were split; the tombs were opened and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of the tombs after His resurrection they went into Jerusalem and appeared to many.

The centurion (Matthew adds, and those assigned with him) and all the multitudes assembled to see the sight of the crucifixion, saw sights they had not expected. Darkness for three hours, earthquake and other phenomena (about which they all heard) were things which flooded their minds with awe and agitated anxiety (Gr. *sphodra*, “violent restlessness”). The women stood at a distance and saw these things (Mt. 27:55-56). The “on-lookers” returned home beating their *chests* (Gr. *stethe*, “chest”—is the word from which the medical term, *stethoscope*, comes). It was customary to display publicly such emotions as grief, anguish, remorse or shock (see Lk. 18:13). It is still a custom of the people of the Middle East. Perhaps some of the on-lookers, having had time to be away from the mobs shouting, “Crucify Him,” and having seen His divine behavior, had begun to realize Who this was and what they had done! Luke says the centurion “praised God” and said, “Certainly this man was innocent.” Matthew and Mark report that the centurion said, “Truly, this man was a Son of God!” The Greek phrase in Matthew and Mark is *alethos theou huios en houtos*. Literally that would be translated: “Truly, of a god, a son was this man.” The absence of the definite article in Greek constitutes, where the context indicates, the equivalent of the indefinite article in English. We believe the context indicates that here. Furthermore, in Greek, the noun with the definite article identifies, but the noun without the definite article *qualifies*. In this phrase we have the noun (*theos*) *without* the definite article. This centurion was a pagan and probably had no concept of monotheism. Romans often made their emperors and other famous men gods and worshiped them. Especially did the Romans idolize stoic endurance of suffering. The centurion was honest-hearted enough to recognize Jesus’ innocence (Gr. *dikaiois*, “justness”). So what he is exclaiming is that Jesus’ behavior, and the signs he had seen, indicated to him Jesus was probably a son of a god! He knew Jesus was different from any other human beings he had ever known.

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John notes that it was the day of Preparation (Gr. *paraskeue*, "Friday"), Mark expressly says "Preparation" was the day before the Sabbath (Mk. 15:42), and the Jews, meticulously careful that no bodies be left hanging after sundown Friday (which would be the beginning of Sabbath), encouraged Pilate to speed up the execution (Jn. 19:31-37). Romans employed a very grim method of hastening execution by crucifixion—they smashed the legs of the victim with an iron hammer. This kept the victim from being able to support himself so his body sagged and cut off his breathing and he suffocated. Also, the utter shock of such treatment usually precipitated immediate death. John emphatically states as an eyewitness that Jesus was dead. John notes that the soldiers did *not* break the legs of Jesus *because He was already dead*, (Jn. 19:33). One of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear (Jn. 19:34) and at once there came out blood and water. It is very important that we mention John's eyewitness testimony here, for if Jesus did not really die, He was not really raised from the dead. In fact, that is the primary thesis of Dr. Hugh Schonfield's celebrated book, *The Passover Plot*. He theorizes that Jesus did not really die on the cross but He had plotted earlier with some of His friends that they should drug Him while He was being crucified. Then when He appeared dead, they should ask for His body and put Him in a tomb so that He might later come out and appear to have risen from the dead. We prefer to accept the testimony of an eyewitness, John, rather than the theory of someone writing two thousand years removed from the actual event.

SECTION 3

Interred (23:50-56)

50 Now there was a man named Joseph from the Jewish town of Arimathea. He was a member of the council, a good and righteous man, ⁵¹who had not consented to their purpose and deed, and he was looking for the kingdom of God. ⁵²This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. ⁵³Then he took it down and wrapped it in a linen shroud, and laid him in a rock-hewn tomb, where no one had ever yet been laid. ⁵⁴It was the day of Preparation, and the sabbath was beginning. ⁵⁵The women who had come with him from Galilee followed, and saw the tomb, and how his body was laid; ⁵⁶then they returned, and prepared spices and ointments.

On the sabbath they rested according to the commandment.

23:50-52 Compassion: The fact of Jesus' death is of such importance we here summarize the gospel's testimony to it:

- a. "He gave up His spirit" (John 19:30).
- b. The centurion stood facing Him and saw that He had breathed His last (Mk. 15:39).
- c. The soldiers came to break His legs but saw that He was already dead (Jn. 19:33).
- d. John saw Him die and claims to be an eyewitness (Jn. 19:35).
- e. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus knew He was dead, Mt. 27:57ff., Jn. 19:39, two council members of the Jewish Sanhedrin.
- f. Pilate made sure by questioning the centurion that Jesus was dead (Mk. 15:44-45).
- g. Joseph and Nicodemus put His body in a tomb and rolled a stone against the door (Mt. 27:59ff.; Mk. 15:46ff.; Lk. 23:50ff.; Jn. 19:38ff.)

Joseph's home town, Arimathea, was fifteen miles east of Joppa. Joseph was a rich man, indicated by the fact that he had a tomb hewn for himself out of solid rock. He was a *respected* member of the Sanhedrin (Mk. 15:43) and "was looking for the kingdom of God." This undoubtedly infers he believed the prophets of the Old Testament and believed Jesus was the fulfillment of them. He was a *good* man (Lk. 23:50-51) who had voted contrary to the Sanhedrin's sentence of death for Jesus. G. Campbell Morgan notes: "It is an interesting fact that on that day, when He was dead, those who cared for His final burial were secret disciples. . . . In the hour of crisis, it is often some loud-voiced Peter who says, Though all forget Thee, yet will not I, who fails, while the secret disciples suddenly gain courage." It was Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, men who loved, and men who believed in the coming of the kingdom, who buried Jesus. No hand but the hand of love ever touched the dead body of Jesus. Those who loved and believed Him took Him down from the cross, and put His body in a grave they provided. It was those who loved Him and believed Him who anointed His body with spices. God would not give the body of His Son to the pagans or the Jewish rulers to desecrate further.

23:53-56 Crypt: Just down the slope west from Gordon's Calvary is a garden. At the north end is a rock wall with an opening. One must stoop to enter. There is a runway there where a large round stone might be moved back and forth. Within the opening is a room, nine or ten feet square. There is a ledge on the east side of the room just large enough to hold a human body for burial. Many scholars believe this is the actual tomb of Joseph where Jesus' body was interred. It does seem to fit every specification of the scriptural account. Note the following:

- a. He was buried in a tomb no one else occupied ever before.
- b. One hundred *litras* (80 lbs. U.S.) of burial spices were used.
- c. There was no time for hired mourners or the other customary rites of Jewish burial at the home.

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- d. The body was wrapped limb by limb with spices sprinkled profusely upon each bandage.
- e. The body was not carried on a bier to the grave as was customary.
- f. Everything was hurried and without ceremony.
- g. It was in a rich man's tomb (fulfillment of Isa. 53:9).
- h. His body did not see corruption (decay) according to prophecy also (Psa. 16:10).

Because it was late Friday evening, and the sabbath began at sundown, the women (those who had come with Jesus from Galilee) simply followed Joseph and Nicodemus to the tomb to make certain they could find it after the Sabbath to anoint it with spices. Luke says, "they *saw the tomb*, and how his body was laid . . ." then they returned to the city to prepare spices and ointments. This is significant. There have been many theories attempting to explain away the testimony of the empty tomb where the dead body of Jesus had been interred. These are attempts to deny the bodily resurrection of Jesus. One of those theories is that the women got lost on their return to the garden, after sabbath, and came to a tomb which was empty, but it was not the tomb where Jesus had been buried. The information Luke recorded was that the women took dangerous but exacting measures to be certain they would *not* return to the wrong tomb. In light of Luke's record which, according to his own preface (Lk. 1:1-4), was written only after the most extensive accumulation of eyewitnessed testimony, it seems ludicrous to try to explain the empty tomb by theorizing these women went to the wrong tomb!

Now the enemies of God have done their utmost. The pretended "ruler of this world" thinks he has "devoured the man-child" (cf. Rev. 12:1-6). If God is to be dethroned, this will be the hour, for His Son has been put to death and buried. The greatest power-confrontation of all time has come to a head. The battle has been fought! But who is victor? Not Satan. He has, in fact, sealed his own doom. He has suffered final and absolute defeat. He has been "cast out" (Jn. 12:31), "destroyed" (Heb. 2:14-15), "judged" (Jn. 16:11), and "bound" (Mt. 12:29, etc.). Death has no power over Jesus (Jn. 14:30)—it cannot hold Him! His followers will go to the tomb to see Him but they will be told they are seeking the "living" among the dead! God is victor! He took the worst the devil could ever do to both God and man, the death of the Son of God and man, and made it the justification of both God and man!

We cannot here continue commenting on the *meaning* of the death of Christ. That remains for the epistles of the New Testament. The purpose of the gospel records was simply to document the facts of His death as written testimonies of eyewitnesses. It is nothing short of supernatural that those who wrote these gospel accounts, some twenty years after the events, did not indulge in expansive interpretations of the facts they recorded.

It should be considered proof that the gospels were written under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, that they do not regale the reader with interpretations of events as most human reporters do.

STUDY STIMULATORS:

1. What kind of pressures would Pilate be under that would make him want to appease a vanquished Jewish hierarchy? Didn't Pilate have freedom to override their demands if he wished? Is Pilate the only political official ever to feel this kind of pressure? How should we expect politicians to react under such pressure? How does God expect them to react?
2. Does it appear to you that Pilate began his review of the charges against Jesus with honesty and justice in mind? Or, maybe he thought he could use this incident to torment his Jewish tormentors? What do you think? In light of unchristian human behavior, what do you think of Pilate?
3. Why didn't Jesus talk to Herod? Does it bother you that Jesus did not even try to get Herod to repent? May we use Jesus' conduct as an example to follow in certain confrontations we may have?
4. What does the demand of the Jews to have Bar-Abbas released instead of Jesus show about their purposes and relation to God's Word?
5. What does the scripture say about those who violate their own conscience? (cf. Romans 2:12-16; 14:1-23; I Cor. 10:23-30). Is that what Pilate did?
6. What is your reaction to Jesus' compassionate warning to the women of Jerusalem as He, Himself, was being abused on the way to Calvary? Could you be like Him in such circumstances? Are you supposed to be?
7. What do you think of the method of execution by crucifixion? Do you think it had a deterrent-value? Is execution necessarily supposed to be humane? Is crucifixion any less humane than Jewish death by stoning?
8. When Jesus prayed for the forgiveness of those crucifying Him, did God answer His prayer? When? How?
9. Where is "Paradise"? When did Jesus go there? Is that where all believers go after death?
10. How could a "secret" disciple of Jesus like Joseph of Arimathea get such courage to ask Pilate for the body of Jesus and bury it in his own tomb? What had he done at the Jewish trials of Jesus? Why? Should Joseph have done more in Jesus' defense?
11. What is significant about all the documented details of Jesus' death and burial? Did Jesus really die? What if He did not?
12. What about the importance of the women *seeing* where He was buried?