

did the Jews themselves, and his attempts to save Jesus are a fabrication of the Gospel writers.

5. To what question did Jesus answer "Thou sayest"? What did He mean?
6. Explain how Jesus could confess to being a king, but Pilate would never consider it treason.
7. List the various efforts which Pilate made to release Jesus or to get out of condemning Him.
8. Was Pilate the first to remind the Jews of the political favor granted them of releasing a prisoner during the feast? How do you know?
9. When did Pilate's wife report her dream to Pilate? When did she have it? What was her testimony to Jesus' character?
10. Explain why Pilate's effort to trade Barabbas off for Jesus' release did not work.
11. Explain the people's expression: "His blood be on us and on our children."
12. When was Jesus scourged? Was He scourged more than once?
13. Where, when and how was He mocked by the soldiers? How many participated in this?
14. Give good reasons why Roman soldiers, who presumably would have no personal spite against Jesus, could be so cruel.
15. List every evidence of Jesus' moral stature as His trial before Pilate reveals this.

## SECTION 74

### JESUS IS CRUCIFIED AND BURIED

(Parallels: Mark 15:20-46; Luke 23:26-54; John 19:16-42)

#### DID MATTHEW FORGET THE PROPHECIES?

Anyone who has followed Matthew this far has encountered a formidable array of prophetic quotations that establish Jesus' divinely authenticated Messiahship. By contrast, Matthew now strangely omitted a number of prophetic fulfillments surrounding the crucifixion. Perhaps this is because this master writer knew that his Jewish readers would be so permeated with Psalm 22 that Jesus' Aramaic cry on the cross would, alone, be sufficient to suggest the details of the entire Psalm. (Could this have been Jesus' own purpose for shouting these specific words rather than something else?) Further, Isaiah's Servant of Jahveh may be discerned in every part of this entire section (Isa. 53). Simply to underscore every allusion of word of the Psalmist or

Prophet fulfilled in some phase of Jesus' crucifixion is to produce the startling effect of a well-underlined page.

Matthew's confidence, that the unshakeable certainty of his facts possessed persuasive didactic power, may have prompted him to tell them simply, letting their own eloquence speak convincingly to the Jewish heart. Thus, his readers' own conclusions about Jesus, the fine result of their personal reflections on God's Word, would be far more powerful than had Matthew spelled them all out. However, since the prophecies would be less well-known to the non-Jewish readers of other Gospel writers, these latter rightly cited them for their extremely significant didactic value.

## ON THE WAY TO GOLGOTHA

TEXT: 27:32-34

32 And as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name: him they compelled to go *with them*, that he might bear his cross.

33 And when they were come unto a place called Golgotha, that is to say, The place of a skull, 34 they gave him wine to drink mingled with gall: and when he had tasted it, he would not drink:

## THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Do you think that Jesus carried His entire cross or merely the crossbeam?
- b. Why do you think the soldiers forced Simon of Cyrene to carry Jesus' cross? Had Simon done something wrong or did Jesus simply need this help?
- c. Do you think they suspected him of being a secret follower of Jesus and intended to make him share His humiliation?
- d. Why was Jesus crucified outside of town?
- e. Why, if Matthew is writing for Jews, did he feel it necessary to translate the term "Golgotha," which any of them could have understood without the translation? Did he simply copy from Mark, as some assert?
- f. Why did someone offer Jesus some wine to drink? Was this normal?
- g. Why do you think Jesus refused it?

## PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

So the soldiers took Jesus along, leading Him out to crucify Him. He went out, carrying His own cross. As they were leaving the city, they happened upon a man named Simon. (He was a Cyrenian, the father of Alexander and Rufus.) He was passing by on his way in from the country. The soldiers seized him and pressed him into service. They made him shoulder the cross to carry it behind Jesus.

Also following Him was a large number of people, including grief-stricken women who were wailing for Him. Jesus, however, turned to them to say, "Women of Jerusalem, do not cry for me. Weep, instead, for yourselves and for your children, because, remember, the time is coming when the wail will be, 'How fortunate are those women who never had any children, never gave birth to babies or nursed them!' That will be a time when people will begin to cry to the mountains, 'Fall on us,' and to the hills, 'Hide us.' For if people do this when the wood is tender and green, what will happen when it is old and dry?"

Two other men, both criminals, were led away to be executed with Him. The soldiers brought Him to the place called "Skull-place." (In Aramaic it is called "Golgotha.") There He was offered wine drugged with myrrh, but, after tasting it, He refused to drink it.

## SUMMARY

Jesus carried His cross to the edge of Jerusalem where it became apparent He could bear it no more. The Romans impressed a Cyrenian, forcing him to carry it out to Calvary. Jesus' suffering excited the compassion of women but He refused it as misdirected. On Golgotha He also rejected a compassionate anesthetic. His humiliation was increased through "guilt by association," since He was to suffer with two criminals.

## NOTES

Shame converted to glory

27:32 **And as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name: him they compelled to go with them, that he might bear his cross.** Whether or not condemned men normally shouldered an entire cross—either already assembled or the unjoined beams—or merely

the horizontal cross-arm to the place of execution, John described Jesus as going "out bearing his own cross" (John 19:17; cf. 27:32; Luke 23:26). Jesus' attempt to bear His own cross gives character to His challenge that we take up our cross and follow Him (10:38; 16:24).

At the edge of Jerusalem, utterly exhausted from His trials and the pain of the scourging, He apparently collapsed under its weight, unable to continue. However, the soldiers' duty was to guard the condemned men against escape or liberation. Because they dare not expose themselves to attack by helping him, a substitute is required to carry Jesus' cross. Seeing Simon just then coming into town, the soldiers requisitioned his services to carry it, following Jesus to Calvary. (So, the Synoptics.) The impressment of Simon's help implies that his strength was needed to bear "the cross," not merely the upper crosspiece.

That *Simon* came from *Cyrene*, an important north African city, does not decide whether this Jew were a resident of the Jerusalem area to be distinguished from hundreds of other Simons by his city of origin, or one of the millions of Passover pilgrims who arrived from Jewish colonies around the Roman world. (Cf. Acts 2:10; 6:9; 11:20; 13:1; 1 Macc. 15:23; 2 Macc. 2:23; *Ant.* XIV,7,2; XVI,6,1.5; *Against Apion*, II,4.) He is later identified as the father of Alexander and Rufus, men apparently well-known to the early Church (Mark 15:21; Rom. 16:13?) That he was selected out of the crowd for so lowly a service does not prove him a slave, because the Romans would not bother about his social status but judge him on his strength to carry the cross to the place of execution. Impressment or requisition of anyone's service for certain limited service was the Roman right. (Cf. 5:41.)

But that he was "coming in from the country" does not prove (1) that he were a farmer who had been working in the fields that day, nor, consequently, (2) that the day in question were anything but Friday morning of Passover week, as if travelling were forbidden on regular feastsdays. To suppose him to be a farmer one must also see him as returning from field work about *nine o'clock a.m.* (Cf. Mark 15:25.) Perhaps out meditating in the glorious morning air of a country springtime, he was just returning for the hour of prayer at the temple.

The death march was composed of a centurion leading probably 12 soldiers divided into three details responsible for guarding the two malefactors and Jesus (Luke 23:32). Wending their way through the crowded streets of the city, they encounter a "great multitude of the people and of women"—probably not His followers—who, out

of well-meaning, motherly sympathy, raised a funeral lament for this popular young man so unjustly condemned to death (Luke 23:27ff.). A death wail of "the wailing women" was customary and would be taken up almost immediately upon death. (Cf. 9:23; Luke 8:52. See Matt. 11:17.) Ever grateful, compassionate and self-forgetful, the Lord paused to warn these unbelieving sentimentalists of their own future desperation when at the fall of Jerusalem, their sons would be massacred by wicked men and their own death would be preferable to their fear and wretchedness. (Cf. 24:19.) Despite the immediate atrocity He Himself must undergo, He could picture His own future as glorious (Heb. 12:2).

### The turning-point of world history

27:33 **And when they were come unto a place called Golgotha, that is to say, The place of a skull.** Mark's "they brought him" (Mark 15:22: *pherousin autōn*), suggests that, since Jesus' collapse required help in bearing the cross, the soldiers perhaps supported Him, half-carrying Him to *Golgotha* . . . *the place of a skull*. "Calvary" (*calvus*, "bald, scalp" *calvariae locus*) is simply a Latin word that translates the Greek, *krānion*. (Cf. Latin "cranium.") Matthew translates this Aramaic word, not for his Hebrew readers, but for those who read only Greek. (Cf. 27:46.)

Hebrew law and practice placed executions outside of the camp of Israel or its towns. (Cf. Lev. 24:14-23; Num. 15:35f.; Josh 7:24ff.[?]; I Kings 21:13; Acts 7:58.) Further, Jesus, who is to be the sin offering for the world, is also symbolized by offerings taken outside the camp of Israel (Exod. 29:14; Lev. 4:12, 21; 9:8-11; 16:10, 21f., 27; Num. 19:3, 9). Thus, also Jesus' final torment occurred "outside the gate" of Jerusalem, yet "near the city" apparently near a main road (Heb. 13:11f.; John 19:20; Matt. 27:39). The precise location of this *place of a skull* has been obscured by the following difficulties:

1. The macabre name would be derived, not from unclean skulls lying about (which would require the reading: *kraniōn* gen.pl. *tōpon*), but from some historic or topological reference:
  - a. its proximity to a cemetery of which nothing is stated in the text;
  - b. its regular use as a place for public executions, which is even less supported;
  - c. its shape bore free resemblance to a skull. Luke terms it simply "Skull" (*krānion*, not *krāniou tōpos*), as if this were sufficient to describe the place.

2. Its location may well be affected by the history of Jerusalem:
  - a. Around 44 A.D. Herod Agrippa initiated an ambitious project of urban expansion that may have enclosed *Golgotha* within the city about 14 years after Jesus died there (*Wars* V,4,2f.).
  - b. In 70 A.D. after a devastating siege, Jerusalem was virtually destroyed and sites around it were altered by the war itself.
  - c. After the ill-fated Bar Cochbah uprising, Hadrian rebuilt the already desolated city as Aelia Capitolina, a Roman city constructed on the ruins of the former Jewish capital.
  - d. Any site is affected by the location of the northern wall of Jerusalem in 30 A.D., an archeological puzzle not yet definitively settled.

The traditional site is covered by the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. A more convincing candidate is a hill north of the Damascus Gate, which has two small caves that give the appearance of eye sockets of a skull without a jaw. Discovered by Otto Thenius, this site was popularized as Gordon's Calvary. The quite ancient, apparently unused rock-hewn tomb located in a garden at its base argues favorably for this site, although some date the tomb in the second century. Certainty that this location today resembles its appearance two thousand years ago is, however, lacking. That this tomb was apparently never used nor developed in successive ages is motive to ponder. . . .

27:34 **they gave him wine to drink mingled with gall: and when he had tasted it, he would not drink.** Charitable Jews and Romans both customarily gave condemned men a heavily drugged drink. The former aimed at deadening the pain. The latter were simply facilitating their work of crucifixion: it is easier to handle a drugged man (*Prov.* 31:6f.; cf. *Plin.* 20, 18; *Sen. Ep.* 83 cited by Farrar, 638).

Matthew says the wine was mixed with *gall*; Mark has "myrrhed wine (*esmurnisménon oínon*)" (*Mark* 15:23). Wine flavored with myrrh was known in the ancient world (Arndt-Gingrich, 766). Perhaps "myrrhed" connotes "spiced" without necessarily specifying "myrrh." So, Matthew indicates the particular drug involved as *gall*. But is *gall* (*cholês*) anesthetic? The LXX used *cholé* to translate Hebrew words for (1) gall; (2) poison; (3) wormwood. (See Arndt-Gingrich, 891.) However, in addition to bitter, poisonous substances, *gall* may have associated with it the idea of anesthetic, especially when the Hebrew word *rosh*, translated *gall*, referred, among other things, to poppy (*papaver somniferum*, *I.S.B.E.* 1167).

Or vice versa, *cholé* often translated *gall*, simply points generically or figuratively to any bitter substance (Lam. 3:15; Prov. 5:4; perhaps also Ps. 69:21), and the particular bitter element added to this wine was myrrh.

They kept trying to give Him the pain-deadener (Mark 15:23: *edidoun*). Jesus' refusal of this kindness had nothing to do with its bitter taste, as if the drink's bitterness were intended as an additional cruelty. Although His was not a stoic refusal to shield Himself from pain, some think that He was determined to experience death at its worst to make Himself like His brethren even in this respect (Heb. 2:9, 17). Others think He refused, that His sacrifice might be conscious. More simply, the price for keeping His mind clear until the last was having to endure pain as any other man. Even though the use of a powerful drug can be justified for others facing excruciating pain and natural death, His refusal illustrates what it means to be alert and on guard, so as not to enter into trials unaware of their insidious temptations and unprepared (26:41).

*When he had tasted it, he would not drink.* If He did not want any, why taste it? Did He not know what it was? He simply did not use His miraculous knowledge when a taste would supply Him the information. (Cf. notes on 21:19.)

Could a Jewish reader see an allusion to Psalm 69:21 in this?

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. Where according to Jewish law must executions occur?
2. Whom did the soldiers compel to carry Jesus' cross?
3. Where was he coming from at the time?
4. Explain why he was compelled to bear Jesus' cross: (a) what right did the Romans have to do this? (b) what need was there to find someone else to carry the cross? (c) how may this incident be harmonized with John's Gospel that affirms Jesus carried His own cross?
5. Define the terms: "Golgotha" and "Calvary." From what language does each word come? For what possible motive(s) was the area called this?
6. Locate the two more famous sites identified for the crucifixion. Explain why identifying the one true location is uncertain at best.
7. Explain the purpose of the wine mingled with gall.

## THE DEATH OF CHRIST

## Crucifixion and accusation

TEXT: 27:35-37

35 And when they had crucified him, they parted his garments among them, casting lots; 36 and they sat and watched him there. 37 And they set up over his head his accusation written, THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

## THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Why remove Jesus' clothes? Only to leave Him naked on the cross?
- b. Why would soldiers even want the second-hand clothing of a condemned man? Are not these pretty meager spoils?
- c. Do you think the soldiers were deliberately crass to roll dice for Jesus' clothes?
- d. Do you think David intended to prophesy the sufferings and death of Jesus in Psalm 22 or was he merely describing his own sufferings caused by his own enemies? On what basis do you answer as you do?
- e. What do the prophecies about Jesus' death tell us about its meaning?
- f. Why would Matthew, who cited so many fulfillments of prophecy in the life and ministry of Christ, suddenly abandon this method during the crucifixion scenes, when so many noteworthy fulfillments were available? Would not his readers appreciate his bringing them up?
- g. Why do you think Pilate formulated the accusation on the cross in precisely those words? Was he expressing his personal contempt toward Jesus or toward the Jews or both?
- h. How do you account for the differences between the Gospels as to the correct reading of the inscription on Jesus' cross? Did the sign say different things? Or did it say only one thing? Decide!
- i. Matthew hardly describes the act of crucifixion itself: the nails, the size and configuration of the cross, the ropes, the raising, etc. What does this suggest about his purpose or view of the matter?



## PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

At Golgotha the soldiers crucified Jesus and, along with Him, the two criminals, one on His right hand and the other on His left. Jesus was in the center. He prayed, "Father, forgive these people, because they do not know what they are doing."

Pilate also prepared the written notice, indicating the charge against Him and had it put on the cross over His head. The title read: "THIS IS JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS." Many Jews read this sign, since the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city of Jerusalem, and the sign was written in Hebrew, Latin and Greek. This is why the chief priests protested to Pilate, "You should not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but, 'This guy said, I am the King of the Jews.'"

"What I have written," Pilate answered, "is going to remain that way."

After nailing Jesus to the cross, the soldiers distributed His clothes in four parts, a share for each soldier, rolling dice for them to determine who should receive what. However, His tunic was seamless, woven all the way from the neck down. So they talked it over, "Rather than tear it, let us roll the dice for it to decide who will get it." This resulted in the fulfillment of Scripture, which says, "They divided my garments among them, and rolled dice for my clothes." This is exactly what the soldiers did.

It was about nine in the morning when they crucified Jesus. Then they sat down to guard Him there.

## SUMMARY

On the central cross between two criminals they crucified Jesus who prayed for the forgiveness of His tormentors. Pilate's statement of the charge irritated Jewish sentiment but remained the unchanged declaration of Jesus' Kingship. The platoon in charge of Jesus divided His personal clothing by rolling dice for it, then relaxed on the ground as they guarded Him.

## NOTES

... THEY HAVE PIERCED MY HANDS AND MY FEET.  
 I CAN COUNT ALL MY BONES:  
 PEOPLE STARE AND GLOAT OVER ME  
 THEY DIVIDE MY GARMENTS AMONG THEM  
 AND CAST LOTS FOR MY CLOTHING. (Ps. 22:16b-18)

27:35 **And when they had crucified him, they parted his garments among them, casting lots.** With great simplicity Matthew omits the ugly details of the crucifixion. But an understanding of his hideous form of capital punishment will explain the contempt and aversion early Christians faced as they preached "Christ crucified." (Cf. I Cor. 1:18ff.; Gal. 5:11.) Study these texts of Jesus' contemporary:

Illustrations of crucifixion: *Ant.* XI,1,3; 4,6; XX,6,2; *Wars* II,5,2; 12:6; 13:2

Crucifixion's brutality: *Ant.* XII,5,4; *Wars* I,4,6; V,11,1; II,14,9; VII,6,4

Crucifixion perpetrated by Jew against Jews: *Wars* I,4,6

Release from crucifixion: Josephus' *Life*, 75

Interest in the painful details is not totally dwarfed into insignificance by the moral issues that were resolved at Calvary, because (1) other Gospels record more of these details, and (2) the details themselves render far more vivid the cost of our salvation. This hideous death involved painful wounds, forced immobility, difficult breathing, exposure to the elements, insects, taunting by enemies, all contributing to a slow, agonizing death. However, in contrast to the commentaries, the spartan brevity of the Gospel writers turns the attention away from these physical tortures to the spiritual issues at stake here. Jesus' suffering was unique in that He who had known the closest possible comradeship with God must submit to the torments of the damned.

First they stripped Jesus of His clothes. Next came the actual nailing Him to the cross. This was done while it was yet lying on the ground. The belief that Jesus carried only the horizontal cross-member while the vertical pole awaited Him on Golgotha raises other questions: would Jews permit the upright poles of crosses, normally a Roman method of execution, to remain permanently erected so near the Holy City, near a public road? If so, how many? It is simpler to see that His entire cross was brought from the Praetorium. (See on 27:32; John 19:17.) Some anatomists believe that the nails were driven through His wrists rather than through the palms, because the body weight would have pulled against the nails and torn out away before long. But was the nailing of the hands to keep them in place or to support the body? A wooden support on which the crucified could sit seems to have been the only other relief (Alford, I,293; Farrar, *Life*, 639). Apparently Jesus' feet were not merely bound to the cross, but also nailed (Luke 24:39).

Then the cross was raised and dropped into a hole dug to receive the lower end of the upright timber. The height of the erected cross

needed to be only slightly taller than a man. Disputes about the form of the cross are futile, as the Romans would probably spend little effort to build this rude wooden device not intended for beauty or comfort but for disgrace and death. However, its form permitted the affixing of the accusation "above His head" (27:37). The fine, polished-wood beams of crosses today represent the reality about as unconvincingly as our lives reflect that of Him who died there.

He made intercession for  
the transgressors (Isa. 53:12)

No sooner had Jesus been nailed to the tree than He prayed His unforgettable Intercessory Prayer: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34; cf. Isa. 53:12). Here the soldiers first experience a direct, personal contact with Jesus' magnanimity. Not an outburst of fury against them but a pained prayer of pardon for them! His spirit found an excuse for this outrage perpetrated against God, not only by the soldiers who were simply following orders, but especially by those who turned Him over to them (John 19:11), and generally everyone whose sins put Him there. They did not dream that they were crucifying "the Lord of Glory" (I Cor. 2:8), "killing the Author of Life" (Acts 3:15-17) and "fulfilling the prophets (Acts 13:27). Because the Son's suffering was a crime against the majesty of God, He begged the Father to hold back His wrath, lest the divine purpose be compromised by an untimely rescue. If God were ever tempted to stomp the world out of existence and rescue His dear Son, this was the day! (Cf. Stephen's expression: Acts 7:60.) By His own readiness to forgive, He cleared His own heart of all vindictiveness. This was no blanket pardon that ignores each man's attitude toward God. Rather, because individual pardon is not given without personal repentance, His prayer is tantamount to asking God to give men a merciful opportunity to repent.

*They parted his garments among them, casting lots.* That Jesus was stripped completely is a shamefully real possibility. Nakedness would disgrace Him in His suffering. (Cf. Rev. 16:15.) However, Edersheim (*Life*, II, 584), believed that "every concession would be made to Jewish custom, and we may thankfully believe that on the Cross He was spared the indignity of exposure. Such would have been truly un-Jewish."

The *garments* of the condemned became the meager spoils of the four soldiers ordered out on this crucifixion detail. In Jesus' case the

royal garment and the crown of thorns were now gone (27:31). He had only His own five articles of clothing to divide among four soldiers. After His belt, sandals, cloak and head-gear, all of approximately the same value, had been distributed, one valuable article remained: Jesus' one-piece, continuously woven tunic (*chitôn*: "tunic, shirt"). Since this could not easily be divided without ruining it, the men decided that a decision of chance would determine its new owner. *Casting lots* is the normal way of obtaining something by a means completely out of human control (Luke 1:9; Acts 1:17, cf. v. 26; II Peter 1:1). By turning Jesus' garments over to new owners, they treat Him as a criminal as good as dead. However, shocking to the Psalmist or us, these soldiers' deed was but their normal practice, hence not intentionally malicious toward Jesus personally. In fact, the clothes of the two robbers were not unlikely distributed in the same manner. But even this crude bit of official business attended to by dice-rolling military men was foreseen in the divine purpose (Ps. 22:18). The prophecy's literal fulfillment is the more remarkable because it was executed by men totally unaware of its existence. Unintentionally, they too point to Jesus as the Man intended by the prophet.

Mark notes the hour of crucifixion as "the third hour when they crucified Him" (Mark 15:25), or nine o'clock a.m. as the Jews reckoned time.

**27:36 And they sat and watched him there.** Although this squad of soldiers can now relax somewhat, their purpose for being there was not only to attest to the death of the crucified but also to guard against any last-minute attempts to rescue any of the crucified (*watched - guarded, étéroun*). Perhaps even at this point when the physical exertion of the crucifixion was completed, they took a break for a drink and, as a crude joke, toasted the health of the King of the Jews, deriding Him (Luke 23:36f.).

#### Pilate's revenge

**27:37 And they set up over his head his accusation written, THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS.** Because the crucifixion was a public affair, its purpose was to discourage the spectators from crimes against the state. The crudely lettered *accusation* was borne to the cross either as a placard around the neck of the condemned or carried by one of the soldiers. Specifying the crime for which the condemned is executed, it drove home a grim warning to others who might be

tempted to make the mistake of committing a similar crime. This argues that accusations were probably nailed to the thieves' crosses too. To give the inscription the widest publicity possible, it was written in the common languages of the era, Greek, the universal tongue, Latin, the official language, and Aramaic, the local dialect.

There is no contradiction between the Gospels over the exact reading of the title's inscription, because

1. The basis of each version may be a free rendering by each author as he translated it out of Hebrew, Greek or Latin. Perhaps the title varied somewhat in each of the three languages. Should the Gospel writers be blamed for these variations?
2. Matthew calls it *his accusation written*; Luke, "an inscription" and John, a "title." Pilate's wording may have expressed the *accusation* even more fully than the composite of all the Gospel writers' summaries.
3. Even if each language repeated all the elements verbatim, our authors preserved the essential message unchanged in meaning. There is no contradiction where no author denies the wording of the others, and when each seeks only to quote the substance of the accusation without quarrelling over details given or omitted by the others. They simply do not tell all they know. Even with minor variations, the central message can correctly be recovered: "This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews."

Since this ambiguously expressed title was dictated by Pilate himself, some see it as the ironic expression of the haughty prefect's cynicism. Certainly an *accusation* per se was no mere second thought by the wily Roman, especially if such titles were common practice. Pilate may have ordered it nailed to His cross to clear his record with Caesar, since the basic charge of blasphemy for claiming to be the Son of God would not interest Roman jurisprudence. In theory, it named Jesus' crime. In reality, its wording gave Him a title. No crime whatsoever is indicated. Admittedly, Pilate was crucifying the Nazarene, but he nonetheless ennobled Him to the rank of king! He had cleverly transformed the *accusation* into a vindictive insult to those who had forced him to authorize the execution of this innocent man.

Because Jesus had interpreted for Pilate the true meaning of His claim, the latter comprehended the unpolitical nature of Jesus' Kingdom. Against this spiritual *King of the Jews* the charge of political insurrection remained unproven. So, the governor's inscription, which

unconditionally affirms His kingship, becomes Jesus' definitive clearing of the political charges. This *accusation* was Pilate's final protest of Jesus' innocence and, by reflection, his public exposure of the rulers' bitter jealousy. For Pilate to crucify Him with two malefactors does not negate this view, because this guilt by association is not intended by Pilate to humiliate Jesus, for He must die anyway, but to embitter the Jews in their moment of victory.

Although Pilate could not have intended it this way, the official title, *the King of the Jews*, when considered as a phrase in Matthew's Gospel, even if unexpectedly and subtly yet truly and profoundly reflects the divine purpose. How little they knew: He was not merely *King of the Jews*, but the Lord of the universe and King over all men (28:18; Rev. 17:14). Even so, He arose out of Israel and rules over all who become part of the true Israel of God (Rom. 9:5; Gal. 6:16). It is not improbable that Jewish readers of Matthew would notice the not insignificant coincidence that the *Gentile* wise-men asked, "Where is He that is born *king of the Jews*?" and the *Gentile* governor proclaimed: *THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS*. These two astonishing facts with which the amazing life of the Nazarene begin and conclude become unexpected signposts leading one to take the evidence for His identity seriously. Was Israel blind to its true *King*? (Cf. 27:54.)

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. Describe the crucifixion, using all the facts available in the Gospels. How was Jesus crucified? Who actually did it? Who was with Him? Who were the spectators? Where did they stand or sit?
2. Describe the division of Jesus' garments among the soldiers.
3. What prophecy was fulfilled in the peculiar disposition made of Jesus' clothes?
4. Why did the soldiers sit down and watch Jesus? In what sense "watch" Him?
5. For what purpose was the sign attached to the cross?
6. Quote the inscription Pilate ordered attached to the cross above Jesus.

Reviling abuse and shame  
heaped upon Jesus

TEXT: 27:38-44

38 Then are there crucified with him two robbers, one on the right hand and one on the left. 39 And they that passed by railed on him,

wagging their heads, 40 and saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself: if thou art the Son of God, come down from the cross. 41 In like manner also the chief priests mocking *him*, with the scribes and elders, said, 42 He saved others; himself he cannot save. He is the King of Israel; let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe on him. 43 He trusteth on God; let him deliver him now, if he desireth him: for he said, I am the Son of God. 44 And the robbers also that were crucified with him cast upon him the same reproach.

### THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Men rightly marvel at the sad beauty of Jesus' last words on the cross. Study them and pause to reflect how few they are. Then think on the words that Jesus, hanging there in His pain-wracked body, did NOT say.
- b. Why do you think two robbers were executed with Him?
- c. Why do you suppose the robbers reviled Jesus too? Did they know Him? If not, what could they have possibly had against Him to justify their railing?
- d. How would you harmonize their reviling with Luke's report of the penitent robber?
- e. In what way was Jesus severely tempted on the cross? Was Satan there that day?
- f. Do you think that the crowds or their rulers would have really believed Jesus, if He had performed the supreme miracle of ripping out the nails and leaping down from the cross? Why do you say that?
- g. In what sense is it true that those who mocked Jesus were saying more truth than they knew? That is, in what way do they unintentionally glorify Jesus?
- h. In contrast to the political charges the authorities had leveled against Jesus before Pilate, what do these openly religious accusations spat out at Him at the crucifixion reveal about those who tried to crucify Him on purely political grounds?
- i. Is there any evidence in the scoffers' words that they had any misgivings about crucifying Jesus or that they had possibly made a tremendous mistake? Do you think they are putting up a bold front to keep their courage up and their doubts down?
- j. Since Jesus never once relented in His conviction that He was

- the Christ, what possible conclusions could His enemies have drawn about Him?
- k. Even if in quite another sense, we too are like the two robbers, *crucified with him* (Rom. 6:6; Gal. 2:20). What is our commonest reaction to the shame, the scoffing and the pain that go with it? What should our reaction be?
  1. From Jesus' refusal to grant their demand by descending from the cross and their conclusions about it, what may be learned (1) about the program of God; (2) about the validity of human resentment when God denies man's requests?
  - m. From Jesus' silence in the presence of their demands, what may be learned about Him?

### PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

They crucified two bandits with Him, one on His right and the other on His left. The people stood there, staring. Passers-by jeered at Him, shaking their heads and sneering, "Aha! You were the one who was going to destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days, were you? Save yourself! If you are God's Son, step down from the cross!"

Similarly, even the rulers, the chief priests with the theologians and elders, sneered at Him, commenting to one another, "He saved others, but he cannot even save himself? Let him save himself, if he is the Anointed of God, His Chosen One! Let this Christ, this King of Israel, come down from the cross now! If we could see him do that, we would believe in him! He trusts in God, does he? Let God rescue him now, that is, if He wants him! After all, he did say, 'I am God's Son.'"

The soldiers too made fun of Him, by coming up and offering Him a drink of their sour wine, saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" In fact, there was the inscription over Him, which read: "This is the King of the Jews."

Similarly, even the bandits that were crucified with Him also insulted Him. One of them hanging there, abused Him, "Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us too while you're at it!"

But the other checked him, "Have you no fear of God at all?! Both you and He are facing death and judgment before God. But with us it is a question of common justice, since we are getting what we deserve for what we did. But this man has done nothing improper. Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingly power."



"I solemnly assure you," Jesus answered, "you will be with me in Paradise this very day!"

Standing by Jesus' cross were four women: His mother and His maternal aunt, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. When Jesus saw His mother there and His dearest disciple, John, nearby, He addressed His mother, "Lady, he is now to be your son." Then He said to the disciple, "She is now your mother." So from that time on, the disciple took her into her own care and keeping.

### SUMMARY

Passers-by, clergy, soldiers and fellow-sufferers alike taunted Jesus, daring Him to save Himself because of His claim to be the Messiah. Jesus remained silent until one of the bandits repented and asked to be part of Jesus' Kingdom. This request Jesus granted. Then He turned His mother over to John to care for.

### NOTES

He was numbered with  
the transgressors (Isa. 53:12)

27:38 **Then are there crucified with him two robbers, one on the right hand and one on the left.** After Jesus was crucified, His guards sat down to guard Him there (27:36). It would appear, therefore, that, although the *two robbers* were part of the procession from the Praetorium to Golgotha (Luke 23:32f.; John 19:18), they were crucified after Jesus (*Then, tôte*) by two other quaternions of soldiers, as if the raising of each cross required the combined strength of the men. However, it is probable that none of the soldiers rested until the crucifixion of all three was complete.

In the purpose of God Jesus was crucified between two sinners, *one on the right hand and one on the left*. Although men intended it quite otherwise, this providential arrangement pictures the true significance of the cross; our King Himself is the dividing line that separates the living from the dead, the sheep from the goats, the believing from the lost. (Cf. 25:33.) But He identified with us in our sins by dying among common sinners.

That these *robbers (leisti)* are not revolutionaries or insurrectionists like Barabbas (see on 27:16), but common bandits (cf. *Wars*, II,12,5; 13:2; 14,1) is suggested by two considerations:

1. To preserve the calm against predictable violence, were a Jewish folk hero to be crucified by Roman power, they could never permit that two real patriots be executed with Jesus. (Cf. notes on 27:16-21.)
2. The self-incrimination of the repentant *robber* (Luke 23:41) is less understandable, if he considered crucifixion the just sentence for promoting a religio-patriotic revolution against Rome. Contrarily, if his own conscience condemned common banditry and highway robbery, his self-accusation makes better sense.

Luke's word, "criminals" (*kakourgoi*) apparently confirms this view (Luke 23:32f., 39). Therefore, to crucify Jesus between common criminals is to amplify His guilt by association, insinuating that He is no better than they.

All who see me mock me;  
they hurl insults, shaking their head  
(Ps. 22:7)

**27:39 And they that passed by railed on him, wagging their heads.** If the crosses were located near a main road for maximum publicity of this exemplary punishment, then *they that passed by* would be many. By this characteristic gesture of *wagging their heads* (cf. 109:25; Isa. 37:22; Jer. 18:16; Lam. 1:12; 2:15), they unintentionally fulfill prophecy (Ps. 22:6, 7). Milling around the cross and snarling at Him like so many wild animals, they show their inhumanity. (Cf. Ps. 22:12f., 16). *Railed on him* (*eblasphemoun auton*), from the Christian standpoint, means they insulted the deity of Christ. But, because they repudiate His claims as false, in their own view they are hurling the abuse that He justly deserved. Nevertheless, they are inexcusable, because His divine credentials were completely adequate to convince the good and honest among them.

**40 and saying, Thou that destroyest the temple and buildest it in three days, save thyself: if thou art the Son of God, come down from the cross.** Because they misapply His cryptic "Temple prophecy" to the Jerusalem sanctuary, they presume that anyone who could replace that grand structure in just three days, could surely perform the smaller wonder of rescuing himself from a cross. Consequently, they wrongly interpret His inaction now as proof He had made exorbitant, unjustified claims.

But even as they poured ridicule on Him, by crucifying Him they were bringing about the true meaning of the very prophecy they

misinterpreted, for He spoke of the temple of His body. God would rebuild *it in three days*. Jesus Himself was God's true dwelling among His people. Although they repudiated *this* Temple by crucifying Jesus, God would raise up that Dwelling of God, of which the Jerusalem temple was but a dim, feeble symbol. But by crucifying Jesus, they guaranteed the Temple's desolation, since their rejection would bring God's wrath upon them in that one generation. Thus, they would themselves "destroy this temple [in Jerusalem]" but after three days Jesus would resurrect a far more glorious Temple, the true dwelling place of God in the Spirit!

In the person of these worldlings, their lord, Satan, is back and launching one attack after another (Luke 4:13). *If thou art the Son of God* echoes Satan's original seduction and repeated here for the same reasons (cf. 4:3; Luke 4:13). They, like him, know of only one style of Sonship, that of self-interest, personal rights and self-vindication. They argue that a true *Son of God* would never agonize on a cross!

In the Jewish accusation note the absence of the article. Even without it, His claim to be *the Son of God* (*huiòs toû theoû*) is one of the bitter bones of contention for which they crucified Jesus. (Cf. also 27:43; see notes on 26:63ff.) Yet they fully grasped His claim and crucified Him for it.

Apparently the presence or absence of the definite article made no significant theological difference for the Jews. (Cf. 26:40, 43; John 19:7 without article; however, 26:63; Mark 14:61 and Luke 22:70f. have the definite article.) They crucified Jesus for claiming to be *huiòs theoû* or *ho huiòs toû theoû*. This animus had begun early (John 5:18). They understood the meaning of His words and repudiated it, but their understanding should be definitive enough for Christian theology too: He claimed to be, not a son of a god, but *the Son of God*. (Cf. Luke 1:35 in Greek.) Moreover, titles or names are definite whether or not they have the article (here: *huiòs theoû*). This grammatical understanding of the article also affects the centurion's view, as he heard the Jews use these terms.

**MANY BULLS SURROUND ME;**

**STRONG BULLS OR BASHAN ENCIRCLE ME.**

**ROARING LIONS TEARING THEIR PREY**

**OPEN THEIR MOUTHS WIDE AGAINST ME. (Ps. 22:12f.)**

27:41 In like manner also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said. Abandoning the dignity of their age and office, the revered leaders of Israel lower themselves to show their contempt *in like manner*, i.e. like uncultured, undisciplined passers-by. The unsanctified fellowship of the nation's leaders appeared at Golgotha in person, their old, common fear now replaced with common childish glee and wisecracking. Perhaps they had originally intended not to attend the crucifixion, but when the offending title on the cross came to their attention and no appeals to Pilate could get it corrected, they determined to counteract its forceful influence by discrediting Him personally. To sway the impressionable crowds even then milling around Golgotha, they could transform the Nazarene's death into even more effective propaganda against Him and His movement.

FOR THE TRANSGRESSION OF MY PEOPLE  
HE WAS STRICKEN . . . (Isa. 53:8)

27:42 He saved others; himself he cannot save. He is the King of Israel; let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe on him. They triumph over their former fears that He would use His undeniably miraculous power to save Himself. They can afford to do it now because He is so obviously helpless to do so just when He needed it most for Himself. They admit that *He saved others*? They objectively admit nothing. Just as they do not believe that *He is the King of Israel*, so they debate this proposition too: "*He saved others*? Everyone talks about how *He saved others* from the common trials of life, from various sicknesses and even from death. The truth of these tales would be instantly and most certainly verified, if this miracle-worker could free Himself from His own woes!" Although intellectually unable to account for the source of His power, they treat His miracles as spurious, judging everything in the light of His present failure to perform in this supposedly critical, definitive test.

It is at this point that the chasmic distance between our Lord and all human demagogues is most noticeable; these authorities had attempted to save their institutions, their positions and themselves from the certain dissolution they see must result from Jesus' self-giving ministry (John 11:47-53). Nevertheless, by trying to save what they deemed the most important things in their lives, they lost them (16:24ff.). By sacrificing Himself, He won everything.

*He is the King of Israel:* the Messiah. He had tacitly accepted this title as royal authority was attributed to Him during the Triumphal entry. For maximum effect Jesus' detractors deliberately aired these popular views to show their groundlessness when applied to one who is now so obviously unable to realize all the glorious hopes predictable of a true *King of Israel*. *Let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe on him.* These hypocrites express their openness to become His disciples upon His immediate descent from the cross as the decisive, unmistakable credential they had always been asking for. (Cf. 12:38ff.; 16:1ff.; Mark 8:11f.; John 2:18; 6:30.) The power of this diabolical temptation lies in the self-assertive desire to perform His most telling miracle to date, which, in the estimation of sinful men, would shake these hypocrites like nothing else. But this is precisely the moment *not* to perform the self-vindicating miracle required. He must keep His mind on the true challenge: *Let him come out of the tomb alive and victorious and we will believe on him.* The true test of His identity is not their proposals, but the successful accomplishment of God's will!

**27:43 He trusteth on God; let him deliver him now; if he desireth him: for he said, I am the Son of God.** The enemies maliciously worded their blasphemous railing to call to mind Psalm 22:8, perhaps just to explode the false martyrdom of Jesus and disprove His claims. To the words of the Psalm they add the word, *now*, demanding that God instantly test the worth of Jesus' confident assertions by revealing their basis in some tangible way. They could safely apply Messianic prophecies to Him, since, in their view, He was indisputably incapable of fulfilling any Messianic texts like Psalm 22:8. It was the resurrection that would turn their own sword against them. The unhurried God could not be bullied into an untimely miracle that would compromise His eternal plan. Even so, the temptation is real: Jesus' personal confidence in the faithfulness of God is put to the supreme test. (Cf. Ps. 22:4f.; John 11:42.) This will give special poignance to His later cry of loneliness (27:46).

*I am the Son of God.* (See notes on 27:40; 26:63ff.) Their underlying argument is that God really cares about His true *Son* and would never leave Him to die, never subject Him to such an ignominious death as crucifixion. Jesus, however, is left to die. Therefore, He was not a true *Son of God*. Nevertheless, for good and sufficient reasons, God's mighty love made Him sacrifice this His only *Son* (John 3:16). Similarly, God's love for His saints does not always compel Him to deliver them from pain or death. Even their death can praise Him, as did the compelling example of Jesus.

The apparently unassailable logic of the Sanhedrists had as its special target the conviction of the masses who passed by. Their arguments would make sense to anyone who could be stampeded into deciding instantly before all the evidence was in. After all, if Jesus *could* not come down from the cross, or if God *would* not rescue Him, would not that prove Him an imposter?

**27:44 And the robbers also that were crucified with him cast upon him the same reproach.** *Robbers:* see note on 27:38. There is no evidence that these bandits simply shared the crowd's malice toward Jesus. They may have known little about Him. Perhaps they angrily blame Jesus because His crucifixion was the reason they were being executed sooner than expected. Although the two reproach Jesus, only the impenitent one blasphemed. (Matthew: *oneidizon*, "reproach, revile, heap insults upon," Arndt-Gingrich, 573; Luke: *eblasphémei*.)

There is no inconsistency with Luke's account of the penitent bandit. Matthew and Mark simply report how the two robbers began insulting him together. Luke does not assert that only one of them offended Jesus. Rather he tells that, when one of them did so, his fellow scolded him. Apparently, the marvelous conversion of the penitent robber began sometime during the three hours together with Jesus on the cross before the unnatural darkness. As time dragged by, the penitent's slow death forced him to reflect upon the state of his own soul, upon his own real guilt as opposed to Jesus' guiltlessness and upon His marvelous self-control during agonies that the dying thief understood only too well. (Cf. Luke 23:40f.) His reason calmed him. The other bandit, however, kept up his tirade, demanding: "Save yourself and us" (Luke 23:39)! Unrepentant, he wanted to escape his apparently sealed destiny and so incited Jesus to use His great, pretended powers to effect their release. The other bandit shamed him into silence by defending Jesus, "Both you and He must soon stand before God. He has no sin to answer for, but does not the threat of divine justice warn you not to aggravate your guilt by mocking your fellow-sufferer?"

This *robber's* lone voice raised in protest against Jesus' unjustifiable crucifixion is the only one recorded. No longer justifying himself, he cast in his lot with a King whose only visible throne was a rough-hewn tree like his own. It is not known what this *robber* knew previously about Jesus' mission and message. Nevertheless, while others remained unmoved even after Jesus arose from the dead, this man witnessed the King Himself being conquered by death and *still surrendered* his believing heart! No wonder that Jesus graciously assured

him far more than he asked, a place with Him that very day in the invisible world where only believers enjoy the presence of God! (Cf. Luke 23:46; II Cor. 12:2f.; Rev. 2:7.)

Peter's comment on Jesus' self-possession is most eloquent (I Peter 2:23f.). His silence is evidence of self-mastery and power over temptation. By His acceptance of whatever God's grace sent, He demonstrated total trust in God's provision (6:25ff.). In this most desperate situation He lived out His own doctrine of non-retaliation (5:38ff.). By this extremely convincing example He showed what it means to save one's life giving it away (16:24ff.). He did not respond to their cruel jibes, because it was a moral impossibility for Him to satisfy their demands and save a lost world too. He ignored their challenge because His mighty love and His will to save them held Him nailed to the cross.

But why should God remain shockingly silent and seemingly unperturbed, when, alone, His own dear Son was brutally tortured and killed by religious bigots who dared God to intervene? For those who have eyes to see it, He bared His patient heart fully as much by His refusal to interfere now as by His other revelations elsewhere. But the Father was not wholly absent or dispassionate. (Cf. 27:45, 51.) The living God sometimes appears silent and unfaithful to His promise to save, seeming to deny the rightness of the plan He Himself taught and the confidence of His children. But Jesus did not waiver. His death becomes an act of faith in the love of God, notwithstanding this seeming indifference of Heaven.

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. Describe the kind of "robbers" who were crucified with Jesus.
2. What was the prophecy fulfilled by His being crucified with them?
3. List all the various titles for Jesus mentioned in this section as these are hurled at Jesus to taunt Him. (You may include those reported by Mark and Luke too.)
4. What prophecy was fulfilled by the reproaches of the people?
5. List the various insulting statements by which the crowds taunted Jesus, explaining what they meant by them.
6. Explain what Jesus' refusal to accept the crowd's challenges proves about His true identity.

## DARKNESS AND DEJECTION

TEXT: 27:45-50

45 Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. 46 And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? 47 And some of them that stood there, when they heard it, said, This man calleth Elijah. 48 And straightway one of them ran, took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink. 49 And the rest said, Let be; let us see whether Elijah cometh to save him.

## THE SADDEST MOMENT IN HISTORY

50 And Jesus cried again with a loud voice, and yielded up his spirit.

## THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. What do you think caused this great darkness? Why do you decide this way?
- b. How much territory do you think the darkness covered? How would you decide this?
- c. Do you see any relationship, on the one hand, between the darkness on the day Jesus died and His cry of abandonment by the Father, and, on the other hand, the outer darkness and separation from the presence of the Lord to be suffered by the damned? If so, what connection is there?
- d. What sacrifice was sacrificed every day at the ninth hour? Do you see any connection between this and Jesus' death?
- e. Why do you suppose Jesus cried out the words, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Did He just make up these words? Why would Jesus repeat them at this terrible moment?
- f. If Jesus were somehow deity, how could He cry out to God? If He were deity, is He merely talking to Himself? If He is a man talking to God, then is He not merely human? How do you solve this puzzle?
- g. Since Jesus spoke in Aramaic, someone shouted, "He calls for Elijah." On what rational basis could this confusion arise?
- h. Why did Jesus drink the wine offered Him now, when He had refused the wine mingled with gall earlier? What is the difference?
- i. When someone offered Jesus a drink, others tried to hinder him.



Why would anyone object to giving the thirsty man a drink on that occasion?

- j. Can we, who so placidly read the account of Jesus' crucifixion, really understand what that simple word "crucified" meant to Jesus who endured it?

### PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

About noon an unnatural darkness similar to a solar eclipse came over the whole country and lasted until three o'clock in the afternoon. About three, Jesus shouted, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" (This means: "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?")

Some of the bystanders who heard it commented, "Hey! this man is calling Elijah!"

After this, since Jesus knew that His task had now been completed, in order that the Scripture might receive complete fulfillment, He said, "I am thirsty."

Now there was a jug full of a diluted sour wine drink, so someone immediately ran to it, took a sponge and soaked it with the wine, put it on a hyssop stick and held it up to Jesus' mouth to drink. But the others said, "Wait, let's see if Elijah comes to save him!" whereupon the first man retorted, "Let me do this, let's see if Elijah is coming to take him down!"

When Jesus had drunk the sour drink, He gave a mighty shout, "It is finished! Father, I intrust my spirit into your hands!"

With these words He bowed His head, yielded up His spirit and breathed His last.

### SUMMARY

Three hours of darkness marked the last half of Jesus' crucifixion, at the end of which He quoted the appropriate words of Psalm 22:1. Here, too, His words were twisted into an appeal to Elijah. Thirsty, Jesus asked for a drink. They gave Him the cheap, soldier's beverage. Refreshed, He triumphantly announced the successful completion of His mission, calmly committed His soul to the Father and surrendered His life.

### NOTES

The darkest day in world history

**27:45 Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour.** Jesus had now been on the cross almost three

hours, from roughly nine o'clock until noon when the ominous darkness began (Mark 15:25). Although Luke's language suggests a natural solar eclipse (Luke 23:44f.; *eklipōntos*), this is excluded by two physical factors:

1. Passover's usual full moon (Exod. 12:18; Lev. 23:5). Every Jewish month begins with a *new* moon. Passover occurs two weeks after the new moon, or at the time of a full moon. But a *full moon* demands a specific relation of the moon and sun to the earth whereby the moon can reflect the sun's light without obstruction. On the contrary, a solar eclipse is created by the moon's obstructing the sun's light. The relative positions of sun, moon and earth during an eclipse are more like their conjunction around the time of a new moon. Hence, a *natural* eclipse could only have occurred two weeks before this Passover when Jesus died.
2. Even though a solar eclipse may take four hours from the first moment that the moon begins to cover the sun until it reveals it completely again, the usual duration of a total eclipse lasts rarely longer than 9 *minutes*, hence far shorter than the three hours indicated by the Gospel writers for this unnatural darkness.

Because the sun could be darkened by ways other than by a natural eclipse, Luke's language, therefore, may be justified by supernatural power: God could easily have produced a strange darkening resembling an eclipse. God was not entirely absent; rather, by His withdrawing the world's light, He manifested His presence and concern. But evidence of His presence did not stop here (27:51ff.).

Did the *darkness* extend over the entire earth or only of some significant area of Judea or Palestine? The *cause* of the darkness determines its extent. Since the sun's light failed (Luke 23:45), it would normally affect all the earth's entire daylight hemisphere. Thus, it is clear that *all the land* (*pâsan tèn gên*) may well mean that more than just the entire region surrounding Jerusalem was enveloped in *darkness*. (Cf. Mark 15:33 = Luke 23:44.) Neither is impossible with God. But the former seems better supported.

What meaning should be given to this phenomenon?

1. Neither in prophecy nor in Jewish traditional expectations was the *darkness* a sign directly or specifically connected with the death of the Messiah (Edersheim, *Life*, II, 605).
2. It was not Nature protesting against the wickedness of Jesus' execution nor mourning His wretchedness. This view fails to explain

why Nature waited three hours to act. Further, it animistically gives personality to what are but elements in the natural world, the impersonal creative expressions of God's word. Even so, God could utilize these natural elements as a superhuman, audiovisual means to protest violently against the death of their Creator. (Cf. 27:51-53.) It is *as if* heaven and earth were in convulsion, mourning Him who created them. In the timing of these phenomena coincidental with the death of Christ, there is a hint that all creation depends on Him, for He sustains it by His mighty word and that earth's destiny ultimately rises or falls with Him (Heb. 1:3; Col. 1:17; II Peter 3:5-7).

3. In apocalyptic language the turning of the sun into darkness is a popular symbol for a radical change in world affairs, because these changes often involve great judgments of God (Isa. 5:30; 13:10; 50:3; 60:2; Joel 2:10, 31; 3:14f.; Amos 5:18, 20; 8:9f.; Rev. 6:12ff.; cf. II Peter 2:17). *Though these and such poetic allusions as Jeremiah 15:9 or Job 9:7 are not pertinent to the Messiah's death nor to be taken literally*, nevertheless, a people imbued with these concepts, by an association of ideas would be prone to think first of God's judgment as the ultimate cause of this literal effect in nature.
4. Did God screen the last tormented hours of His Son's life from the curious stares of jeering crowds? Was it also relief from the sun during its hottest brilliance?
5. Was this a miraculous heavenly sign Jesus' enemies had demanded? (Cf. Exod. 10:21ff.) Although this could have happened by natural causes, the marvelous coincidence with Jesus' suffering points to a supernatural origin. In context with the other-worldly events on that day (27:51-53), the darkness may have been only a prelude aiming to capture the attention of the most calloused, stirring them to reflection on the odd coincidence between the death of that Galilean Prophet and these signs from heaven. Who indeed was He for whom these portents speak?
6. Because Jesus' cry of abandonment came in close connection with the end of the darkness (27:45f.), the darkness is suggestive of the "outer darkness" and utter separation from the presence of the Lord to be suffered by those who do not let Jesus' suffering be the price of their redemption. (Cf. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30; II Peter 2:17; Jude 13; II Thess. 1:9.)

Because the crowd seems to be considerably less vociferous at the end of the phenomenal black-out, the terror of the darkness must have quieted the bitter enthusiasm of a majority of the mockers. Mostly His friends and the soldiers remain. Luke 23:48 may mean that many simply did not dare leave in the darkness.

. . . Stricken, smitten by God and afflicted . . .  
(Isa. 53:4)

**27:46 And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?** The Lord had been hanging on the cross nearly six hours from midmorning until midafternoon, around three o'clock. (Cf. Mark 15:25, 33.)

Matthew quotes Jesus verbatim in Aramaic, then translated the meaning into Greek for his non-Aramaic readers. In what sense did God forsake Jesus? His choice of words, Psalm 22:1, is not coincidental, but intentional and highly revealing.

1. It can be validly argued that David simply prophesied Jesus' suffering on the cross; as does Lenski (*Matthew*, 1118): "For it is not due to the fact that David wrote this line that Christ made it his cry on the cross, but because Christ would thus cry out on the cross David wrote it as a prophet." However, other equally reverent views are also possible.
2. It is not the cry of personal guilt nor because God did not approve of Jesus' obedient life and ministry. Otherwise, why justify Him so completely by the convincing stamp of approval given in the resurrection?
3. Nor is this an abandonment of Jesus' humanity by His deity, the splitting of His divine-human personality. (Cf. Phil. 2:5-11.) His unique unity of mind, purpose and nature with the Father is not now interrupted (John 10:30). Only He who has fully experienced the comradeship of equality with God can know what it means to suffer its loss by being so completely forsaken by Him. Jesus does not sense a loss of part of Himself, but of the fellowship of *God*.
4. Rather, the source of this unaccustomed inaccessibility to the divine Throne lies in His very humanness, for it is as God's creature, as Man, that He cries out. (Cf. John 8:29.) Incarnation means He completely shared in our humanity (Heb. 2:14; 4:15). Is it a human cry crushed out of ANY GODLY MAN who struggles with

the torment over the injustice of his suffering, life and death, evil and good? Otherwise why express Himself in the precise words of the Psalmist's complaint (Ps. 22:1)? He really felt the intensely depressing loneliness all of us feel at such an hour, and this cry gives appropriate words to His pain. Jesus knew in that moment what we go through: He has been there (Heb. 5:7-9; I Peter 2:21)! But there is much more.

5. His cry reveals a psychological abandonment by God that was morally necessary to render Jesus' victory more glorious and meaningful to man. As *Man at His weakest*, stripped of any help unavailable to any other man, He defeated Satan and all he could hurl at Him in this last supreme effort (II Cor. 13:4; see notes on 4:2f.). All who are tempted must see that in Jesus of Nazareth God's adversary has been met and defeated by One who, though *deserted to die*, remained completely able to parry his every temptation with unconquerable determination and courage! By His having to undergo all the fury and hate of God's enemy as do we, He became the more amply qualified to be our Lord and Savior. But so much more conclusively He also condemned yielding to sin and wiped out every whining justification on the ground of the weakness of our human condition or that we feel abandoned by God to our fate. He has been there and won! His classic victory has shown us all how.
6. The awful accumulation of sin of the entire human race was being borne by Him who considered intolerable the slightest suggestion of sin. This takes us into the very essence of atonement. Far more than any other, THIS Man must feel the awesome loneliness and isolation of the sinner, not through any fault of His own, but because He deliberately chose to become the sin-bearer of the entire human race (Isa. 53:6; Matt. 20:28; Rom. 5:6ff.; II Cor. 5:15, 21; Gal. 2:20; 3:13; I Tim. 2:6; Titus 2:14; Heb. 9:12, 26, 28; 10:10; I Peter 1:19). In this cry for the hearing of the whole human race of which He is the only completely voluntary member, He shouts the true meaning of unrepented sin and its consequences: a holy God cannot look upon evil (Hab. 1:13). Nothing could remove the sin Jesus bore, except His own death. His God-forsaken humanness gives real meaning to His sacrifice. Until this was completed, perhaps the Father was forced by His own character and love for Jesus to turn His gaze from His own dear Son. The only Man who deserved to live is facing the wrath of God, the curse and sentence of death,

the wages of sin. He underwent the ultimate horror of separation from God that we might not have to (Heb. 13:5)! He bore our curse and our burdens alone (Isa. 53:4-6, 10). His grief, pain, loneliness and desolation were real. And should He NOT cry out? Was this not the very definition of hell: to be segregated from the light of the Father's face, tormented by Satan's worst and responsible for the accumulated sin of all of Adam's race?

His cry, *My God*, expresses no conflict with the divine purpose, but a first-hand experience of the price demanded by His total cooperation with the divine plan. Even near the extreme limit of His strength and oppressed by His sense of being forsaken, His *My God* breathes the same unwavering confidence and obedient spirit of His earlier "Not my will but yours be done." He is determined not to surrender His godly trust. This *God* is not deity of others, but *His God*. Whatever theological impact His sense of abandonment by God has, His life ended like His suffering began, in prayer, "Father . . ." (Luke 23:34, 46), conscious of His communion with *God*. (Cf. John 16:32.)

For the sensitive Hebrew, this significant choice of words would communicate His application of the entire Psalm 22 to His own life situation. Hebrews entitled literary works by their opening line. Genesis is entitled *Bereshith* = "In the beginning . . ."; Exodus becomes *Veeleh shmoth*. "These are the names . . ."; Leviticus is *Vayyikra*, "And he called . . .", etc. Psalm 113 is called "Hallel" from its opening word. A dying Christian, unable to finish the phrase, "Nearer My God to Thee . . ." would communicate to those at his bedside that he was thinking of that great hymn. In a similar way, Jesus, whose whole soul was permeated with Scripture, may have been expressing Himself in the words of Psalm 22 precisely because of the appropriateness of the Psalmist's words to communicate His immediate situation. The attentive believer could discern how truly and completely Jesus was experiencing even the loneliness of abandonment by God Himself. And yet, in the presence of despair and tragedy, He shouted with poignant power to uncomprehending disciples everywhere that in God's Word lie power, hope and security. Man can live confident of every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God, but he can also die that way!

Just as He withstood Satan's original temptations by unshaken dependence on God's Word, so He beat Satan down at the final challenge in the same way. If in the shadow of the cross, He sang the Scripture (26:30), should it be thought strange that this godly

Man should rivet His attention on the purpose of God by hurling at His own unrelieved pain and the injustice of His suffering the words of God expressed in this Psalm? Like Jesus' suffering, the Psalm begins in despondency and depression. But the final word sings of invincible faith in the glorious victory of God: ". . . dominion belongs to the Lord and He rules over the nations" (Ps. 22:31)! To express the greatest moments of our lives is there any language like that of Scripture whereby we identify with something eternal, objective and grander than our poor feeble words can conceive? How much more so for the Son of God who thought those words first?!

This cry, according to Matthew's text, begins in Hebrew, *Eli*, and concludes in Aramaic, whereas Mark, according to the best manuscripts, reports Jesus' words all in Aramaic. (Cf. *A Testual Commentary*, 70,120.)

At the ninth hour every day the second daily sacrifice was offered in the Temple. (Cf. Acts 3:1; Num. 28:1-8; 29:6; I Chron. 16:40; II Chron. 2:4; 13:11; Ezra 3:3; 9:4f.; Ps. 141:2; Dan. 8:11-13; 9:21; 11:31; 12:11.)

27:47 **And some of them that stood there, when they heard it, said, This man calleth Elijah.** Who said this? Definitely Jews, because a Roman soldier could hardly be expected to know of the Jewish scribes' erroneous expectation that this undying prophet would return to earth (17:10; cf. II Kings 2:11; Mal. 4:5f.). Several motives for their reaction are possible:

1. Perhaps because His mouth and throat were dry, as shown by His later request for a drink, and His breathing difficult as His chest muscles strained, the hubbub and noise combined with the similar-sounding words to hinder many from hearing the words clearly.
2. Perhaps because the words are Aramaic, some Hellenistic Jew who understood little Hebrew or Aramaic could mistake the word "Eli" for a prayer to "Elijah" (*Elei*) not understanding the rest of the sentence. But the bilingual Jews present could have corrected the misconception based on mere linguistic error.
3. More likely it was the malicious irony of prejudice. What bilingual Aramaic-speaking Jew would have mistaken this citation of Psalm 22:1 for an invocation of the prophet Elijah? It is plausible that those who heard the original cry understood it all too well. But their unbelieving bias against Jesus made a crude pun of it by turning *Eli* into *Elias* thus devising but another form of heartless

ridicule. They had insisted that God save Him. Now, when God would not rescue Him, they ridicule as if Jesus had turned to Elijah. If Elijah was scheduled to come before the Messiah, Jesus Himself could not be the Messiah. By implication, He is ridiculed as appealing to the forerunner of the very Christ He claims to be (cf. 11:11, 14; 17:10-13).

My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth . . . (Ps. 22:15).

They gave me vinegar for my thirst (Ps. 69:21).

**27:48 And straightway one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink.** This sentence of Matthew does not appear to fit the context of the preceding verse. What does the reaction of the man, who ran *straightway* to prepare Jesus a drink, have to do with His cry of abandonment (v. 46) or the conclusion that He was appealing to Elijah (v. 47)? John's account removes this obscurity: *straightway* after crying out His sense of abandonment. Jesus also said, "I thirst" (John 19:28f.).

The fact that *straightway one of them ran* sounds like instant military obedience to orders (from the centurion?). Crucifixion was normally an ordeal that lasted a day or two, depending on the endurance of its victims. Because terrible thirst also characterized this torture, that a *sponge* and vessel of *vinegar* were present argue that this was the normal way the soldiers *gave drink to* the executed. Drinking from a cup would be difficult for the crucified to manage, hence the other method: a *sponge filled with vinegar* fastened to a *reed*. The commonness of the method appears to argue, therefore, that giving Him a drink was not unusual but a normal kindness offered any dying man. John reported what kind of stick it was, i.e. hyssop. Since the crosses need not have been tall to accomplish their purpose, the soldiers could almost reach Him to give Him a drink (Luke 23:36). So, a short hyssop stick to reach the lips of the crucified.

As its name implies, the *vinegar* drink was sour (*oxos*) in taste. But the soldiers who brought it for their own lunch called it *posca*, the regular diluted sour wine of the military. "It relieved thirst more effectively than water and, because it was cheaper than regular wine, it was a favorite beverage of the lower ranks of society and of those in moderate circumstances" (Arndt-Gingrich, 577; cf. Ruth 2:14).



Although He had turned down drugged wine before. Jesus accepted this wine because of His severe thirst and since this wine was not anesthetic. Instead, it gave Him the needed clarity of mind and voice for the last effort of His life. Just as Jesus would not begin His suffering drugged by myrrhed wine, so now He would not leave it so weak He could not talk. He would go out with power. The drink provided the energy for what He must do next.

Could a Hebrew reader miss the connection between this and Psalm 22:15 or 69:21?

**27:49** *And the rest said, Let be; let us see whether Elijah cometh to save him.* Despite the uncanny midday darkness just concluding, these skeptics continue to scoff at the possibility of a spectacular intervention of the supernatural to rescue Jesus ("to take him down" from the cross, Mark 15:36).

**27:50** *And Jesus cried again with a loud voice, and yielded up his spirit.* *Again* (= 27:46) The drink cleared His throat and refreshed Him sufficiently so that, summoning what remained of His dying energy and with a voice still strong with life, He could shout triumphantly the victory cry of the completed mission: "It is finished" (John 19:30)! Who would NOT shout, if He was sure his entire life work on earth was perfectly completed, the aim and purpose of Scriptures fulfilled, the redemption of man realized and God's will done?!

Articulate to the very last, He appropriately *yielded up his spirit* in the unshaken confidence and prayer of a loyal Son in full, familiar fellowship with God, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46; cf. Ps. 31:5)! He lay down His life calmly, without reluctance, sure.

That He *yielded up his spirit* is fact, but what this means our limited experience of death may not permit us to know.

1. It seems to be a quibble to say that none of the Gospel writers say, "He died," but used, rather, the euphemism, *He yielded up his spirit* (*apheken to pneōma*) whereby Jesus' death *per se* is thought to be His own voluntary act. However, when the identical idiom is used to describe the death of other people, would it mean they too laid down their lives, i.e. died as an act of their will (LXX of Gen. 35:18; 1 Esdras 4:21; cf. Acts 7:59)? Further, the Epistles do not consider "He died" a misleading expression, but utilize it almost exclusively. Consequently, it is questionable whether the Gospel writers intended that this euphemism bear the theological sense of "He caused Himself to die."

2. The question is complicated by the fact that this expression may be no more than an apt euphemism for "He expired" or "He breathed His last" (*exépneusen*, Mark 15:37 = Luke 23:46). Does this expression mean that death was taking charge of His body, so He committed Himself, i.e. His personality, His mind, will, emotions, conscience and imagination, to God? (Cf. I Peter 4:19.)

It would seem, therefore, that this prayer alone, not His death itself, was His own deliberate act. It is His prayer which expresses in what sense He *yielded up his spirit* when He simply surrendered His life, His real self, back to God the Giver. (Cf. Acts 7:59; Eccl. 12:7.) It cannot mean that, unwilling to wait until natural causes took their course, He willed Himself to die in a self-chosen moment by a death *bordering on suicide*. Although these supernatural options were potentially available for the unique Son of God, His experience of death would be less like our own, if He saved Himself from a prolonged natural death, unless we could do the same. His laying down His life to take it up again refers not merely or specifically to this instant of death,—although, of course, it includes it—but, rather, to that absolute freedom of choice whereby He submitted voluntarily to His entire passion. (Cf. John 10:17f.; 19:30.) To think that Jesus died of natural causes does not detract from the grandeur or voluntary character of His death, because the Son of God could have foreseen these natural causes and prepared for them in harmony with every phase of His atonement. So, although the moral and juridical results of His death are vastly different from ours, the Scriptures do not describe its cause on any basis other than its physical similarity to ours. (Cf. Heb. 2:9-17; 5:7ff.)

Jesus died after only a few hours on the cross. Pilate was surprised that He were already dead, since, as implied by the Jews' request for the summary execution of those crucified (John 19:31), sometimes several days passed before death overtook the crucified. Therefore, Jesus' relatively rapid death may be attributed principally to the terrible scourging from which many men died before getting to the cross. Exhaustion played an important part, because, if Jesus' discomfort on the cross was augmented by His inability to breathe except by repositioning His body, His ability to do this was limited to His physical strength already weakened by scourging, hunger and fatigue, ending in suffocation. It is certain that the spear would and did not kill Him, because when that happened, He had already died (John 19:33f.). Some suggest that heart failure or rupture would

explain both His death and the issuing of blood and water. However, medical authorities are not agreed on the exact cause of His death. The fact that He died is authenticated by His executioners, so we need not go further. To investigate the physical cause is a matter of medical interest, not a dogma of faith.

Do the poetic expressions of Psalm 22:14 and 69:20 help define the solution? Other expressions from these Psalms are taken literally, why not these? Perhaps only in the sense that what was true of the Psalmist could be infinitely more appropriate of the Christ. The Psalmist spoke more truth than he understood. (Cf. I Peter 1:10ff.; Luke 10:24.) Even so, such exegesis involves a figurative application to the Psalmist, but literal one to Christ. The bare, literal fulfillment is not all that God wants man to see. In this sense it is not shallow sentimentalism to think that "Jesus died of a broken heart," because the literal fact points to the higher reality: it hurt Him deeply to bear the guilt and penalties of our sin! Our sinfulness killed Him. Beyond His chosen mortality, is it impossible that the psychological burden He bore literally crushed the life out of Him? Until we understand the psychosomatic equation of our own being, we shall not begin to be able to analyze what happened when Jesus died. Here is where analysis must give way to humble gratitude and worship.

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. At what hour did the unusual darkness occur? How long did it last?
2. What is the only saying of Jesus quoted by Matthew verbatim?
3. What did Jesus mean to communicate by this? To whom was it addressed?
4. What, if anything, does Psalm 22 have to do with the crucifixion? Give details.
5. How did someone give Jesus a drink?
6. What did they offer Him to drink? Why offer Him this?
7. What objection was made to this kindness and why? What is the meaning of "Let be"?
8. About what time did Jesus die?
9. Explain what is meant by "He yielded up His spirit."
10. What sacrifice was killed at the Temple at the ninth hour? What else occurred normally at that same time in the Temple?

## MIRACLES ACCOMPANYING THE DEATH OF CHRIST

TEXT: 27:51-53

51 And behold, the veil of the temple was rent in two from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake; and the rocks were rent; 52 and the tombs were opened; and many bodies of the saints that had fallen asleep were raised; 53 and coming forth out of the tombs after his resurrection they entered into the holy city and appeared unto many.

### THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Why attribute to God what an earthquake may have actually done, i.e. the ripping of that veil? What causes earthquakes anyway? What happened that day anyway?
- b. Assuming that the veil of the temple was miraculously torn "from the top to the bottom," what do you suppose was the purpose of God for this gesture?
- c. What kind of impression do you think the rending of this great curtain must have made on the priests, not to mention the one who might have been burning incense before it at the hour of prayer? (Cf. 27:46 with Acts 3:1; Luke 1:9f.)
- d. Since the veil of the temple was visible to none but priests who could have witnessed it, would priests be likely to tell the story of the end of that from which they derived their livelihood? If so, excluding inspiration for the moment, how could this great secret still leak out and be recorded by Matthew?
- e. What divine purpose do you discern in the opening of the tombs and the resurrection of the saints after Jesus' own resurrection?
- f. Who do you think these saints were?
- g. What became of them after their resurrection? Did they have to die all over again? Where did they go?

### PARAPHRASE

At this point the great veil in the sanctuary split in two from top to bottom. There was an earth tremor and boulders cracked. Even tombs were opened. The bodies of many holy people who had died were resurrected to life. They left their tombs after Jesus arose from the dead and went into the Holy City and appeared to many people.

## SUMMARY

Miracles accompanied the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus: the great Temple curtain that veiled the Most Holy Place was ripped in two from the top by unseen hands! An earthquake split great rocks. Many saintly people who had died were resurrected and after Jesus' resurrection made their appearance in Jerusalem before many witnesses.

## NOTES

**27:51 And behold, the veil of the temple was rent in two from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake; and the rocks were rent.** The heavy *veil* in question was located in the sanctuary to curtain off the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place (Exod. 26:31ff.; 36:35; II Chron. 3:14; Heb. 9:2f.; see also *Wars*, V, 54f.). In the tabernacle first, then in the temple, it served to distinguish the area of the common priests from the symbolic dwelling place of God. So long as this great veil remained intact, the atonement of man's sin was possible only through intercession by sinful high priests and imperfect sacrifices, on the Day of Atonement. Access to the glory of God and the fellowship with Him through prayer were barred by this veil too. (Cf. Heb. 6:19.) Incense and prayer were offered outside it. (Cf. Acts 3:1; Luke 1:8-21.) Jewish tradition (*Mid.* 4,7; *I.S.B.E.*, 2938) declares the *veil* consisted of two exceedingly heavy draperies about 50 cm. apart. For this to be *rent in two from the top to the bottom* would be little short of a mighty miracle.

So, when the great veil came ripping in two and fell apart, the Holy of Holies lay exposed. However, since great golden doors stood behind the veil (I Kings 6:31f.; *Wars*, V, 5,4f.), the priests could not yet gaze with impunity into that dark, bare room. The ark of the covenant had been gone for centuries. Where once the Glory of Israel spoke to His people from between the cherubim, there was now nothing (*Wars*, V, 5,5; *Mish.*, *Yom.* 5,2). Until that great *veil* was replaced, the priests could verify that one more symbol of the great separation between man and God broke down seemingly of its own accord. Ever more clearly "Ichabod" was being engraved upon the Temple; its glory was at last departing never to return. Pagans had gazed upon the emptiness of the Holy of Holies before (*Ant.* XIV,4,4; *Wars*, I,7,6; cf. VI,4,7 also *Ant.* XII,5,4?). Now, however, the Temple's obsolescence is being dramatically revealed to men just at

the hour that the Nazarene, Jesus of Nazareth, expired. Matthew's Gospel practically shouts to those who knew the facts best, "Priests of God and men of Israel, is there any connection between these events?"

The ominous rending of this massive curtain, particularly *from the top to the bottom* at the moment of Jesus' death, would suggest that God Himself opened the way for man to enter boldly into His presence and He did it through the perfectly atoning sacrifice of Christ (Heb. 6:19f.; 9:8, 11, 12, 24ff.; 10:19ff.) Further, this great *veil was rent* at the afternoon hour of prayer near the ninth hour when the officiating priest was in the process of offering incense at the incense altar located just in front of the *veil*. (Cf. Acts 3:1; Luke 1:8-21.) The last daily sacrifice of the Old Covenant, whereby Israel consecrated itself daily to the Lord, was being sacrificed that afternoon. Unexpectedly, the old, symbolic ministry of the entire Levitical system, having fulfilled its purpose, came to the end of its usefulness, finding its perfect completion in Jesus. Godet (*P.H.C.* XXIV, 596) wrote:

As the high priest rent his robe in the presence of a great scandal, so God rent the veil which covers the Holy of Holies, where formerly He had manifested Himself. It implied a desecration of the most holy place, and consequently of the Temple, with its courts and altar and sacrifices. The Temple is profaned, abolished by God Himself. The efficacy of sacrifice has henceforth passed to another blood, another altar, and a new order of priesthood.

This event has tremendous significance for understanding millennial questions. Shall the Jerusalem Temple be rebuilt here on earth and its worship restored? By ripping apart that mighty *veil*, God proclaimed the end of that typical ministry because of the arrival of a superior ministry that was perfect and final, when Jesus our divine High Priest entered *once for all forever* into the true Holy of Holies, the presence of God, to intercede with his own blood for us. *The veil of the temple was rent in two from the top to the bottom*. What God has rent asunder, let not man join together!

Even without special revelation Matthew could have learned of rending of the great veil from a "great many of the priests who were obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7). Indeed, could their conversation be explained by their insight into the meaning of this very sign?

*The rocks were rent not improbably as a result of the earthquake.*

1. In this *earthquake* some discern a symbol of the shaking that began with the death of Christ, a shaking of all that is impermanent or contrary to the Government of God in the moral world until only that which is eternal shall remain. (Cf. Hag. 2:6f.; Heb. 12:26f.)
2. Beginning from the starting point of literal *earthquakes* unquestionably caused by the Lord, it was possible for Jewish poets and prophets to develop poetic imagery based on fearful convulsions in nature whereby the covenant God of Israel revealed His majesty, might and holy wrath against sinners (Exod. 19:19; Ps. 68:8; 114:4-8; II Sam. 22:8; Ps. 18:7; 77:18; Isa. 5:25; 13:13; 24:18f.; 29:6; Jer. 10:10; 49:21; Joel 2:10f.; Nah. 1:5f.; Hag. 2:6; cf. Acts 4:31; 16:26; Rev. 6:12; 8:5; 11:13; 16:18). Thus, for people prepared in this way by their literary heritage, it would be a short mental step from God the cause of the literal to His moral reasons for doing it.

Because Matthew points out that the Romans discerned the connection between "the earthquake and the things that were happening" (27:54: *idòntes tôn seismón kai tà ginòmena*) and the fact that they reacted positively to what they saw, it would appear that *anyone* should be able to see a significant connection between these natural phenomena and Jesus' death. Although earth's natural course regularly continues without interruption when other mortals suffer, here, however, it is brusquely interrupted just at the moment of THIS MAN'S death, and becomes one more portent that points to His world-shaking significance.

**27:52 and the tombs were opened; and many bodies of the saints that had fallen asleep were raised; 53 and coming forth out of the tombs after his resurrection they entered into the holy city and appeared unto many.** Since many *tombs* were carved into the stone face of cliffs, even the opening of the tombs could be produced by the tremor as the rocks were rent. But here its effect stops. Other power is required to give life to the dead.

The fact that the saints are raised, not at the time their tombs are opened, but *after his resurrection* implies that their own resurrection is a result of His and dependent upon it. Death has been self-defeated by the death of our Lord. Life was not merely guaranteed for others but actually produced by His own resurrection. These resurrected saints become an earnest of what shall occur when Phase II of Jesus' earthly victory shall occur at His Second Coming.

A simple reading of the text argues that they arose when He died, hence before He arose.

1. But, if they rose first, they unquestionably remained in their graves until *after his resurrection*, since *coming forth out of the tombs* is connected with *entering into the holy city*. But even if they arose first, like Lazarus and many others, Christ remains the first-born from the dead, the first-fruits of them that slept (I Cor. 15:20; Col. 1:18). He alone is the first to rise by His own power to die no more and guarantee life for all men by the power of His own immortality. These *saints* were raised only by virtue of His death and resurrection. In this sense His uniqueness is not affected by the hypothesis of their prior resurrection.
2. A better view, better supported by the grammar, is to see the words as constituting one complex idea: "they arose and, coming out of the graves after His resurrection, entered" (*egérthesan kai exelthōntes . . . metὰ tèn égersin autoŭ eisêlthon*). The resurrections and appearances in Jerusalem all occurred after Jesus arose.

Lenski (*Matthew*; 1130) and Hendriksen (*Matthew*, 976) argue that only their entrance into the holy city occurred after Jesus' resurrection, whereas "they left their tombs at the moment of Christ's death." But to connect *after his resurrection* with their entrance into the holy city ungrammatically divides a participle (*exelthōntes*) from its main (*eisêlthon*) and links it with a verb from which it is separated by *and* (*kai*).

The solution to the problem of when they arose is perhaps only literary in character, in that Matthew summarized the effects of Christ's death in one place and proceeded to report the resurrection and Great Commission together without returning to report the *saints'* resurrection in its chronological order. This is accepted literary style well documented in Scripture, but gives rise to the debate.

*They appeared unto many*: who are the *many*? Believers? Enemies? Since Jesus Himself appeared only to preselected believers (Acts 10:40f.), perhaps these saints were sent to appear to His enemies. Their appearance in *the holy city*, Jerusalem (4:5; cf. Isa. 48:2; 52:1), points to the directness and power of the evidence. Here, the nation of Israel was gathered for the Passover. Thus, critics at the very heart of Judaism could easily examine the facts: "The amazing resurrections occurred after the Galilean from Nazareth was crucified! Could



there be any connection?" Would not this proof that God had visited His people serve to prepare minds for the Gospel of a risen Christ preached just over a month later?

What happened to these resurrected *saints* after their appearances during the post-resurrection period is not stated. Their spectacular resurrection was incomparably surpassed by the world-shaking tidings that are the heart of the Gospel: Christ Jesus arose! Possibly they eventually joined Jesus for the ascension. (Cf. Eph. 4:8a [= Ps. 68:18]: "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives. . . ." Were these resurrected saints His "captives" to embellish His triumphant return to glory?)

God had neither totally abandoned Jesus nor absented Himself from the crucifixion, merely because He did not intervene to save His Son. He too was there. These miraculous events could not occur unless God had cared enough to intervene in this way. These supernatural acts say, "Notice, I am here!"

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. What unusual events accompanied the *death* of Jesus?
2. Locate the veil of the temple, indicating its function there.
3. At what hour was this great curtain torn?
4. What other events usually occur at that same period in the Temple?
5. When, precisely, did the resurrections cited occur?
6. What unusual events occurred after Jesus' *resurrection*?

### THE WITNESS

TEXT: 27:54-56

54 Now the centurion, and they that were with him watching Jesus, when they saw the earthquake, and the things that were done, feared exceedingly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God. 55 And many women were there beholding from afar, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering unto him: 56 among whom was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

## THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. List every fact in the entire crucifixion to which the centurion and his men were witnesses, that could have contributed to convince them of Jesus' true identity.
- b. When so many other people were present from whom one would more likely expect such a grand confession of Jesus' identity, does it not appear a bit suspicious that it was actually the despised Gentiles who confessed Him? Does it make sense to you that the confessors should be uncultured Roman soldiers, rather than men of thought and culture trained in righteousness by the Mosaic Law?
- c. Why do you think so many women were present?
- d. What fact would explain why Mary, Jesus' mother, is not named in Matthew's list, whereas John affirmed that she was definitely at the cross, and Jesus addressed her directly?
- e. Can you explain why Jesus' friends would remain at a distance? Would there have been more than one reason? If so, what were they?
- f. John affirms that the women named stood close to the cross, whereas the Synoptics all describe them as "looking on from a distance." Who is right? How would you resolve this obvious divergence?
- g. "The mother of Zebedee's children" had asked Jesus that James and John be placed on His left and right in His Kingdom. What do you think went through her mind as she saw the King hanging on a cross between two bandits, one on His left hand and one on His right?

## PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

The centurion was standing facing Jesus. When he and the men, who were guarding Him, felt the earthquake and saw what was taking place, especially how Jesus died, they were deeply shaken. The centurion gave glory to God by exclaiming, "Unquestionably, this man was innocent! He really was God's Son!"

When all the people, who had gathered to witness this spectacle, saw what took place, they returned home, expressing their deep grief. All those who knew Jesus and the numerous women who, when He was in Galilee, regularly followed Him and looked after His needs, stood off at a distance, watching it all. Among those who had come up with Him to Jerusalem were Mary of Magdala, Mary

the mother of James "the Little" and Joseph, and the mother of Zebedee's sons, Salome.

### SUMMARY

The officer and men in charge of the execution reacted to the dramatic events that occurred in connection with Jesus' death, especially the way Jesus Himself gave up His life, by confessing Jesus' innocence and deity. Other spectators expressed their deep grief, while Jesus' acquaintances remained at a distance, watching the scene.

### NOTES

All the ends of the earth will remember  
and turn to the Lord,  
And all the families of the nations  
will bow down before Him,  
For dominion belongs to the Lord  
And he rules over the nations (Ps. 22:27f.).

27:54 **Now the centurion, and they that were with him watching Jesus, when they saw the earthquake, and the things that were done, feared exceedingly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God.** Although the centurion's expression is most memorable, apparently several of the Romans were deeply affected by *the things that were done*. Matthew reports the fine confession as the conviction of several soldiers (pl. *légonies, saying*). Independently of the degree of information and understanding each man had about the true *God*, they discern in the fearful events surrounding the death of *this* man something more than a routine execution. Does raw superstition ordinarily praise God (Luke 23:47)? Or is this the Evangelist's evaluation, i.e. the Romans unconsciously glorified God by their confession? The centurion stood facing Him, so was in an excellent position to observe everything (Mark 15:39). There is little opportunity for deception in his case. Most impressive for military men who have witnessed many men die is the lordly composure and self-mastery evident in the way **THIS MAN** concluded His life (*houtós*, Mark 15:39). Whereas they themselves had mocked Him before (Luke 23:36f.), they had time to gain a healthy respect for someone so self-disciplined even in death as not to reply to the vile outpourings of venomous minds, but pray for the offenders instead (I Peter 2:23ff.).

*Son of God*: did the *centurion* really attest to the divine identity of Christ, or did his words represent a heathen notion: "a son of the gods concerning whose undeserved death the gods were angry?" A primary consideration for determining the *centurion's* meaning must be the language that he had been hearing all morning. Further, was this *centurion* involved in guarding Jesus during His trial before Pilate? (Cf. John 19:7.) If so, what other impressions of Him had begun to form at that time? Unquestionably alert at the cross, he heard the native leaders hurl this very charge at the Man on the central cross: "He said, 'I am the Son of God'" (*theou eimi huios*; 27:40, 43, see notes.). This was the claim that sealed His fate. We may grant that the *centurion* probably did not use their words with the full theological grasp of the Jewish leaders themselves. Nevertheless, if he had been reflecting on this underlying charge, even if it was not actually expressed in the title on His cross, then it would not be at all surprising to hear him conclude that the Jewish leaders were wrong. He was the Son of God after all.

The Romans had also heard Jesus utter two prayers unquestionably addressing God as "Father" (Luke 23:34, 46). Contrary to the Jewish verdict, the Man on the central cross is not merely "innocent" (*kikaios*; Luke 23:47), but also truthful about what He claimed to be, superhuman. To stare death in the face and keep up the false pretense is abnormal unless significantly true. Nevertheless, His dying words commended His spirit to the Father whose Son He claimed to be. This too convinced the soldiers Jesus was righteous. Perhaps no single fact produced this conviction, but the combination of events rising to a dramatic climax: His character under fire, His readiness to die for His convictions and the portentous, unearthly circumstances surrounding His death, led them to conclude He was God's Son. Even in death He powerfully convinced them and they became the first Gentiles to be led to confess the truth about Jesus. Lenski (*Luke*, 1156) is right: "Why reduce these confessions to the lowest possible level? If they amounted to next to nothing, why were the inspired writers allowed to set them down for all time?"

This *centurion* was not known to be a God-fearer from the beginning, like his fellow officers at Capernum (8:10) and Caesarea (Acts 10:1f.). Nevertheless, to maintain that he was a polytheistic pagan is to affirm more than is known, especially since he had heard much that day.. Most remarkable is that they make this startling admission, *even though Jesus did not utilize the power typical of a Son of God to save Himself from execution.*

## Love that would not go away

**27:55** And many women were there beholding from afar, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering unto him. Jesus' friends now stood *beholding from afar*, for many reasons; a few perhaps for fear of being implicated with Jesus, others out of sheer decency to Jesus because their grief would increase His burden, others because helpless to prevent this tragedy, others because uncomprehending and yet rooted there by love stronger than fear. Practically everyone would keep his distance so long as the soldiers guarding the crosses maintained a security zone around the crucifixion area. Until the other two criminals died, the soldiers would cordon off Calvary. And so long as Jesus' powerful enemies monopolized the perimeter around the cross, His friends would maintain their distance.

The Gospel writers emphasize the presence of devoted Galilean women who had followed . . . ministering to Him, especially "when He was in Galilee" (Mark 15:41). These constituted an essential support group, preparing food, washing clothes, etc., so that Jesus and the apostles might labor unhindered. The normalness of this service is more evident when it is remembered that of the women named by the Gospel writers, three are mothers or aunts of a number of the apostles and Jesus. (See on 27:56.) Such wealthy women as Joanna and Susanna distinguished themselves by contributing heavily to the group's financial support (Luke 8:1-3). Even though inexcusable, the absence of the men is somewhat understandable, since they could be accused of a violent rescue plot, whereas the women, normally, would not bear arms. But where were the Eleven? Although John was there, the others are conspicuous for their absence. We may charitably imagine them silently *beholding from afar*, so that John, Mary and a couple of women could venture near the cross unchallenged.

**27:56** Among whom was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the author of James and Joses, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee. His mother had also been present (John 19:25ff.). *Mary Magdalene* was the grateful disciple from Magdala in Galilee (Luke 8:2), absolutely not to be identified with the woman of Luke 7:37. *Mary the mother of James and Joses* was presumably wife of Clopas, brother of Joseph, hence Mary's sister-in-law. If Salome was *the mother of the sons of Zebedee*, then she was Mary's sister (John 19:25). No doubt these dear women all possessed courage and love, but the latter two, probably Jesus' aunts, had also a kinswoman's right to be there. For fuller notes on these women, see Special Study, "The Brethren of the Lord," my volume III, 185ff., esp. 188.

These four women stood much closer to the cross earlier (John 19:25). It is entirely possible that they arrived near the cross shortly before Jesus' death. (Study John's sequence: John 19:25-30.) However, that they were closer earlier and have now moved away from the cross to watch the end, may be perceived from two considerations suggested by McGarvey (*Evidences of Christianity*, 44):

1. Since John's account omits the great darkness, Jesus' consignment of Mary to His disciple very likely preceded it. Without some clear gesture visible to all, it would not be clear precisely to whom His words "Woman, behold your son!" and "Behold your mother!" were addressed. Because His hands were nailed to the cross, the only gesture possible was a nod of the head or a movement of His eyes as He spoke to each one. These would not be visible once the darkness began, hence must be sought for during the first three hours of daylight.
2. If the women arrived at the cross early, before His enemies began defiantly jeering at Jesus, then as this painful scene degenerated, making it both dangerous and painful for Jesus' disciples to remain near, they would naturally desire to withdraw to a safe distance where we find them when Jesus expired.

Further, if the onset of the alarming darkness caused the soldiers to clear the area around the cross for security, the women would have to keep their distance with the others. This is where we find them in the Synoptics. If, when Jesus consigned His mother to him, John immediately guided her away from this terrible place, this would explain why Mary is not named at this later time. John, however, returned to see the end (John 19:35).

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. Who or what is a centurion?
2. Quote the testimony that the centurion and his men bore to Jesus.
3. What is meant by the Romans' exclamation? List everything they could have witnessed that day which would lead to the astonishing conclusion involved in the exclamation.
4. Of what force or value is this Roman testimony, especially in a Jewish Gospel like *Matthew*?
5. Name the disciples present at the crucifixion.
6. In what way(s) had the women contributed to Jesus' ministry?

7. Explain the probable kinship of two of these women to Jesus.
8. Give a reasonable hypothesis why Jesus' mother is not named in Matthew's list of women.

### Jesus is Buried

TEXT: 27:57-61

57 And when even was come, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who also himself was Jesus' disciple: 58 this man went to Pilate, and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded it to be given up. 59 And Joseph took the body, and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, 60 and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock: and he rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb, and departed. 61 And Mary Magdalene was there, and the other Mary, sitting over against the sepulchre.

### THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Why did Joseph of Arimathea approach Pilate for permission to request the body for burial? What further interest would Pilate have in this question?
- b. Why did it take particular courage for Joseph to request the body of Jesus? What could it possibly have cost him?
- c. What do you suppose brought Joseph, a secret disciple, out into the open in this bold way?
- d. How many disciples of Joseph's caliber do you think moved in the circles of Jewish high society?
- e. Why was everybody in such a great hurry to bury Jesus' body?
- f. Do you think Joseph's solution to bury Jesus in his own new tomb was a temporary or a permanent one in Joseph's mind?
- g. Why did they roll a great stone to the door of the tomb? Why not just shut the door?
- h. Why do you think the women followed Nicodemus and Joseph to the tomb?
- i. Why were there only two women at the tomb? Were they helping in some way or just watching? If the latter, what good would this do? Of what special importance to us is their being there watching?
- j. Do you think *you* could have buried Jesus? *Would* you have done it?

## PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

The time was already after mid-afternoon. Since it was Preparation Day, that is, the day before the Sabbath, a man of means named Joseph of Arimathea came forward. An honored member of the Sanhedrin, he was a good, upright man who had dissented from that council's plot and its execution. He lived in the expectation of personally seeing the beginning of God's Kingdom. He too was Jesus' disciple, however secretly, because he was intimidated by the unbelievers in Israel. He found the courage to go straight to Pilate and request that he might take away Jesus' body.

Pilate was surprised to hear that He were dead so soon. Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus were already dead. When he heard the centurion's report that He was dead for some time, Pilate ordered that the body be consigned to Joseph.

So Joseph purchased a linen sheet and lowered the body from the cross. Nicodemus, the man who had called on Jesus by night, arrived too, bringing a 33 kg. (75 lb.) mixture of myrrh and aloes. They took His body and wrapped it along with the spices in the clean linen sheet, like the Jews usually prepare their dead for burial.

Now in the area where Jesus was crucified there was a garden in which Joseph had recently carved his own new tomb right into the rock. It was so new that no one had been buried in it yet. So, because it was the Jewish Friday and the Sabbath was beginning, and since the tomb was conveniently close, they laid Jesus' body there. They rolled a heavy stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away.

Two women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph and Nicodemus. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, the mother of Jesus, were there sitting across from the tomb, observing how and where His body was laid there. Then they went home and prepared spices and ointments. Then they rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment.

## SUMMARY

Two secret disciples of Jesus came out into the open: Joseph of Arimathea, a godly Jewish senator, and a rabbi, Nicodemus. Joseph boldly requested Pilate's permission to bury Jesus and received it. Nicodemus brought the necessary burial spices. Once the body was ready, they laid it in Joseph's new tomb nearby. The two Marys watched the men work, then went home to prepare other burial spices, then rested on Saturday.



## NOTES

. . . With the rich in his death . . . (Isa. 53:9)

What was to happen to Jesus' body when His leaderless disciples were caught completely unprepared to deal with the problem? God provided an unexpected solution.

**27:57** **And when even was come, there came a rich man from Arimathaea, named Joseph, who also himself was Jesus' disciple.** Because these events occurred after three o'clock on Friday afternoon (27:46; Mark 15:42), the "dawning" of the Sabbath at sundown was not far away. So, *when even was come* (*opsias genoménes*) would mean "the first evening," according to the ancient Hebrew idiom for the middle of the afternoon, as opposed to the second evening at sundown. (See Exod. 12:6 in Hebrew: "between the two evenings.") It is highly doubtful (1) that any orthodox Jew would begin to bury at sundown when Jesus' death made this possible three hours earlier; or (2) that getting burial permission from Pilate, going to the cross, taking Jesus down, embalming and entombment could all have been accomplished in just a few minutes. It is more likely that Joseph and Nicodemus acted according to the usual custom of burying the dead shortly after death. Consequently, we may see them beginning sometime shortly after three o'clock (Cf. 9:23f.; 27:46, 50.)

Even if pagans commonly left victims of crucifixion hanging until they rotted or were eaten by scavengers, Jewish law demanded that they be removed the same day of the execution lest they desecrate the land (Deut. 21:22f.; cf. Josh. 8:29; 10:26f.; *Wars* IV,5,2). Traditional preparation for the Sabbath, too, would render it doubly important that the bodies not remain on the cross, desecrating also the Sabbath. So the Jews asked Pilate to order that death be accelerated for the crucified so they could be removed (John 19:31ff.).

Although burial preparations begun on Friday could proceed on the Sabbath (Edersheim, *Life*, II,786; cf. *Shabbath* 23.4f. cited by Barrett, *John*, 465), Jesus' friends would be actuated by the same logic as His enemies to terminate them whereinsofar possible before the Sabbath began. (See on 27:61.) To avoid the indignity of the common grave of criminals for Jesus, they must act rapidly. But who could care appropriately for this? From an unexpected quarter, *there came a rich man . . . named Joseph, also . . . Jesus' disciple* (*ematheteùthe tô Iesoû*, "discipled to Jesus." Cf. 13:52; 28:19; Acts 14:21). He hurried to Pilate, arriving shortly after the Jews

obtained the governor's permission to kill the condemned men. (See on 27:58.)

*Arimathaea*, if identified with Ramathaim, birthplace of Samuel (I Sam. 1:1), lay about 14.5 km. (9 mi.) northwest of Jerusalem. There is another Ramathaim about 73.5 km. (45 mi.) northwest of Jerusalem. Others place *Arimathaea* on the Jewish side of the border between Judea and Samaria about 35 km. (24 mi.) northwest of Jerusalem. (Cf. Luke 23:50.) Although he was from *Arimathaea*, he had since moved to the Jerusalem area, perhaps more easily to serve the Jewish Senate. The permanence of this move is suggested by his having built his tomb there. Thus, his name, Joseph of *Arimathaea*, only serves to distinguish him from many other men of the same name in Jerusalem.

Joseph's position as honored member of the Sanhedrin makes his intervention here remarkable, because he had dissented from that body's majority decision to crucify Jesus. However, his charitable character makes his deed predictably plausible. (Cf. Mark 15:43; Luke 23:50f.) Matthew omits every other distinctive except the fact that he was a *rich man*, perhaps to permit the sensitive reader to focus on this fulfillment of prophecy (Isa. 53:9). Most of Jesus' disciples were poor, obscure people and such lavish entombment would have been inaccessible for them. Unknown to them, God had reserved a man who had both loving devotion and wealth equal to the task of burying Jesus with dignity.

**27:58 This man went to Pilate, and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded it to be given up.** Crises produce different reactions in people: those who had no hesitancy about admitting their discipleship to Jesus do not even come forward to claim His body, while it is the secret disciples who boldly step in to do this.

Considerable courage was required for this godly Sanhedrinist to approach Pilate, requesting for himself the corpse of someone who was not kin to him and whom his own colleagues condemned and Pilate executed as a criminal. He risked having to explain his connections with the Crucified. Although Joseph's loyalty had been hidden, it was genuine. Jesus' death shocked him into action and gave him the boldness he had not possessed until now (John 19:38; Mark 15:43).

Whereas Jesus' disciples had neither wealth nor connections, Joseph's loving respect moved him to throw his prestige into the balance by exerting his influence as a member of the Sanhedrin to

obtain the body and his wealth to secure an honorable burial. It was at the time of His severest humiliation that these aristocrats first confess Him. In this they join the believing centurion and the penitent robber. Despite His being lifted up, Jesus has already begun to draw men unto Himself (John 12:32; cf. 8:28).

Joseph apparently arrived at the Praetorium so shortly after the Jewish delegation had obtained the order for the bone-smashing, that Pilate was surprised that Jesus were already dead (Mark 15:44). Some consider Pilate's surprise incomprehensible, since he himself had just ordered that the condemned men's death be accelerated. Therefore, because he could assume that the soldiers' obedience to this order would assure the death of Jesus along with the others, his wonder, expressed after his own order, is thought impossible. However, because Pilate's order assumed that all three men were yet alive and must be quickly dispatched, he does not expect anyone to arrive so soon requesting one of the corpses. Perhaps even the Jews who approached Pilate did not know Jesus was dead, hence could not inform him of this. (Alternatively: they knew it but would not inform him, so he would order Jesus' legs broken too.) However, the governor had not yet received a final report on the execution of his order. Therefore, because he must not consign Jesus' body to one of His friends until it be quite certain that He was no longer alive, the prefect rightly demanded the positive certification from the centurion in charge. Only upon receiving the centurion's certification of Jesus' death, did Pilate grant Joseph the right to remove the body (Mark 15:44f.). That men survive for several days on the cross has nothing to do with the governor's surprise, because he had ordered the end of their survival!

That Jesus' body had not yet been removed from the cross need not seem strange. Joseph may have gone directly to the centurion at the cross and informed him of his intention to approach Pilate. The centurion, knowing that Jesus was dead and His side pierced, may have ordered his men to leave the body for Joseph to remove. Their duty ended with making certain the men executed were actually dead. To crush the legs of a man already demonstrably dead would be an unnecessary barbarity. Certainty of His death was assured by the fatal stab of the lance (John 19:31-37).

That these two secret disciples were so prepared for the burial of Jesus should not surprise, because anyone could foresee the political disaster to which Jesus' collision course with the priesthood and the

Pharisees must lead, making them pessimistic, hence, more ready for the crisis of His death than others. Further, Jesus' crucifixion that morning made His death that evening a foregone conclusion because of the Jewish tradition of not leaving bodies hanging overnight. So, both Joseph and Nicodemus found their course charted for them, and began buying the necessary linen and spices that day. Charitable burial of the dead was all the contingency plan they needed to move decisively when the emergency arose. (Cf. Tobit 2:16ff.; 21:ff.)

That Joseph went straight to Pilate even into the Praetorium, thus defiling himself by traditional definitions is unimportant, because by touching a dead body, he would defile himself anyway.

**27:59 And Joseph took the body, and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth.** We need not suppose that Joseph worked alone. Not excluding servants, he could work with the women, perhaps John and any soldiers yet stationed at the cross. Perhaps Nicodemus' large quantity of spices were delivered by others who could help too. Taking the body down from the cross, it was perhaps first washed then taken to the tomb for final preparations, the linen and the spices.

Joseph had just bought this *clean linen cloth* (Mark 15:46). That he could do so during that Passover is established. (See notes on 26:17.) This *linen* was *clean*, i.e., not defiled by previous contact with something defiling, as another dead body. Nicodemus too came forward with a large quantity of spices: myrrh and aloes for the embalming (John 19:39-42; 100 *litras* = 100 ROMAN pounds = 33 kg = 75 lb.; cf. Ps. 45:8; II Chron. 16:14). This profuse evidence of his final devoted service is not unusual in its richness. (Cf. Mary's generosity, John 12:3; *Ant.* XVII, 8,3: The burial of Herod I, required 500 servants to bear the spices!) The *linen cloth* (*sindòn*) was apparently long enough not only to envelope the full body front and back, but also to be cut into strips (cf. pl. *onthònia*: John 19:40; 20:5-7; cf. John 11:44 *keirìai*). Then, spices in powder-form were sprinkled liberally into the various wrappings of the *linen cloth* as it was being wound around Jesus' body before being bound (Mark 15:46; John 19:40; cf. John 11:44). Then His head was covered by a large special cloth (John 20:7). Such embalming is totally inconsistent with belief in an immediate resurrection. For these disciples Jesus' death ended His ministry on earth and they express their last devotion in this way.

That these two men coordinated their efforts is suggested by their individual purchases: Nicodemus brought the spices without the linen and Joseph the linen without the spices. Neither item would be considered

appropriate or complete without the other. Perhaps their kindred spirits had drawn them together much earlier, but only the death of Christ brought their secret discipleship out into the open.

### The new focal point of history

27:60 and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock: and he rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb, and departed. Joseph's *own new tomb* was located in a garden in the general vicinity of the crucifixion (John 19:41; cf. notes on 27:33). Even though Joseph had lived at Arimathea, he owned this garden near Jerusalem and, not impossibly, planned to be buried there. Its very nearness to the place of crucifixion may have prompted his offer, because time was not materially available for a distant burial. Its nearness to Jerusalem providentially facilitated the investigation of Jesus' resurrection. His *new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock* seems to have been a man-made cave carved horizontally into the stone face of a hill, rather than vertically down into the soil. (Cf. Isa. 22:16; Luke 8:27; Matt. 8:28.) Although it was large enough for at least two people to enter (Mark 16:5; Luke 24:3; John 20:5ff., 12), its doorway appears to have been low, requiring anyone to stoop to look inside (John 19:5, 11). That Luke and John describe the tomb as "where no one had ever yet been laid," denotes the honor Joseph showed the Lord by not hesitating to place His body in a completely new tomb intended for his own use. (Cf. Luke 23:53; John 19:41.) Joseph could not have foreseen that his new tomb would have been utilized so quickly or for something so significant. Nor could he imagine that what he so unselfishly surrendered to the Lord's use would be so amazingly and so soon restored to him for his own use! Is *anything* sacrificed for the Lord's service ever *really* lost? (Cf. 19:29; 13:44; Heb. 10:34.)

Nicodemus' 100 Roman pounds of embalming spices would not exclude the addition of more spices on the part of the women. Concerning these large quantities, McGarvey (*Evidences of Christianity*, 42) rightly noticed that the Jewish custom of burying was not like the Egyptian embalming. (Cf. John 19:40.) This latter view of burial aimed at conserving the body by arresting decomposition, whereas the Jews apparently utilized spices only to mask the odor of decomposition without arresting it. Naturally, the greater the quantity of spices utilized, the more adequately this would function. This

would account for the 33 kg. (75 lb.) of spices brought by Nicodemus as well as the preparation or purchase of additional spices by the women, one on Friday evening and the other on Saturday just after sunset when Sunday began (Luke 23:56; Mark 16:1).

Why was Jesus not buried in one of the two places set aside by the Sanhedrin for executed criminals? (See Flusser, *Jesus*, 161, who cites Mishna. *Sanh.* 6,5.) Is the choice of burial site evidence that the glorious Sanhedrin of Israel was not responsible for the condemnation of Jesus or that He did not get a true trial before the highest council of Israel? If so, then Jesus was condemned by a kangaroo court, not by the true fathers of modern Judaism who must be defended at the expense of the Gospels. But that this thesis is unfounded is proven by the consideration that the decisively daring move made by Joseph of Arimathea pre-empted conciliar action to bury Jesus elsewhere. Further, the prestigious position of Joseph as a "respected member of the council," was his highest credential to convince Pilate to release the body to him (Mark 15:43). That Joseph acted without the knowledge and consent of the council may be assumed without proof, because, if the contrary were true, the Mishnaic citation of Flusser only proves, if anything, that the burial rule was of more flexible application in Jesus' time than Flusser's defense of the Sanhedrin would allow.

**27:61 And Mary Magdalene was there, and the other Mary, sitting over against the sepulchre.** Mark identifies *the other Mary* as Jesus' mother. (See on 27:56.) These loyal-hearted women from Galilee desired to see both the tomb and how Jesus' body was laid in it, so followed Nicodemus and Joseph (Luke 23:55). Because He was not to have an entombment in the regular cemetery at Jerusalem and since they had not yet seen Joseph's tomb, they needed to know "where He was laid" (Mark 15:47). This information would be needed when they returned to complete the embalming after the Sabbath. Perhaps they originally intended to care for the body themselves, but found that others had come forward with care more adequate than they themselves could have given. They undoubtedly drew much comfort from knowing that their Lord was appropriately buried with respect by two of the nation's leaders. Thus, while Joseph and Nicodemus proceed, the women *sit over against the sepulchre*, watching to see "how His body was laid." However, they did not remain at the tomb for long, because before sunset they left the tomb to prepare more spices and ointments to complete the embalming as

soon as the Sabbath ended (Luke 23:56). That they could purchase whatever was needed that festal Friday is already illustrated at 26:17. However, despite the urgency of embalming a body before decay would render their work impossible, they respected God's will and did no work on Saturday. The women's observing the tomb and the position of the body became a precious part of the evidence for Christ's resurrection, since they knew precisely which tomb had contained the body of Jesus. On resurrection morning they did not return to the wrong tomb and mislead others into thinking He has arisen.

Without detracting one bit of the glory of these faithful women who followed the body to the tomb, where were all the men? Surely after Jesus' death, they might hope that the pressure were over. No one came forward, because fear of the Jews haunted them until after the resurrection. (Cf. John 20:19.) Even if Joseph and Nicodemus were present and personally committed, the women acted themselves with greater courage than most of the men.

Instead of frantic wailing of mourning, Jesus' burial was quiet, serene, and majestic. Two statesmen, who until shortly before were afraid to admit their sympathy with Jesus' movement, now openly, tenderly and magnificently cared for His body. This loving care was completely different from what His enemies could have anticipated. Perhaps they imagined that His body would have been abandoned or tossed into the grave of common criminals. Instead, what had taken place was but the prelude of His glorification.

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. What time of day did the burial occur?
2. On what day was Jesus buried?
3. What prophecy (or prophecies) were fulfilled in Jesus' burial? Give the reference and a brief quotation to identify the text.
4. Describe Joseph of Arimathea, telling what you know of his character, economic strength and position in the Jewish society.
5. What was Joseph's interest in Jesus?
6. Describe the embalming and burial procedure followed by Joseph.
7. List the people who probably helped Joseph with the burial procedure.
8. Describe the tomb of Jesus, its location, its style, its closure, etc.
9. What were the women doing at Jesus' tomb?