

MATTHEW 26-28

MATTHEW'S ACCOUNT OF THE DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS

The following is based on John W. Welch and Brent J. Schmidt, The Gospel of Matthew, BYU New Testament Commentary (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, forthcoming).

The final three chapters in Matthew's Gospel are about the arrest and handling of Jesus by Caiaphas (chapter 26), the deliberations and execution of Jesus under Roman surveillance (chapter 27), and finally the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Son of God (chapter 28). These two chapters are by far the longest of any chapters in this Gospel. Matthew's main overall purpose is to show that everything that happened during these hours happened according to Jesus's foreknowledge, as He and others had prophesied, and with ample witnesses to establish all of this as factual, credible, and eternally true.

Each of the four Gospel writers approached the arrest, trials, and death of Jesus from his own angle. Their reports are not identical, but none of them are wrong on any crucial point. Convenient charts have shown how each Gospel offers important perspectives and includes unique information.¹ For example, Mark's Gospel is matter of fact, objective, and sparse, preferring to highlight dramatic facts using the distinctive words *power* and *immediately*.² Luke was largely interested in social and populist aspects of the stories of Jesus; for example, he highlighted experiences involving Samaritans as well as episodes involving women.³ John's Gospel is very personal; its emphasis shows that Jesus was involved closely with His inner circle of leaders and that He lived by the sublime standards of another world.⁴ Each of these differing points of view contributes to the full story.

Matthew's report highlights details from an Israelite perspective.⁵ His record leans toward points that are of a public nature. Thus, Matthew uniquely points out the truth of Jesus as the Messiah, fulfilling well-known messianic prophecies in the Psalms, the Prophets, and the law of Moses. These points are consistent with the idea of Matthew being a Levite.

In order to understand the final days of Jesus's life, it helps to understand that people generally, whether Jewish or Roman, feared Jesus's supernatural powers. Fear was a common reaction to the amazing, awesome miracles of Jesus. Some concluded that He worked by the power of Beelzebub and "by the prince of the devils casteth he out devils" (Mark 3:22). The King James Version says that when the people saw miracles, they "marveled," but the original Greek word used there means that they "were afraid" (Matthew 9:8). For various reasons, everyone feared anything that resembled magic.⁶ Many powerful people went into panic mode, afraid of what else He could do, especially after Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead in Bethany, just over the hill from Jerusalem. Behind everything in Matthew 26–27 lurks a strong undercurrent of misplaced fear.

Significantly, the angel had announced to King Benjamin in the Book of Mormon that Jesus Christ would go about "working mighty miracles, such as healing the sick, raising the dead, . . . cast[ing] out . . . evil spirits" (Mosiah 3:5–6), but "even after all this they shall consider him a man, and say that *he hath a devil*," and for that reason "shall scourge him, and shall crucify him" (Mosiah 3:9). This was a strong reason behind the execution of Jesus. The chief priests obviously had plenty of reasons to fear Jesus, but the Romans also feared and even outlawed the use of magic. In AD 11, Augustus Caesar expanded the law of *maiestas* to forbid casting spells on people that might threaten the majesty of the Roman people. This crime was broad enough that by the time of the trial of Jesus, it was being used as a general charge against any form of political disloyalty, treason, or uprising, especially in conjunction with the use of supernatural spirits or forces. This fear among the Romans explains why Caiaphas and the chief priests thought they could get Pilate to take action against Jesus. All of this unfolds quickly.

Matthew 26:1–2. Sign 8: Jesus Reaffirms That He Will Be Handed Over and Crucified

After Jesus had finished His teaching, He prophesied about His death for the fourth time. This time He adds details about when and how this will happen: "After two days is the feast of the passover, and the Son of man is betrayed [or handed over] to be crucified." The word *paradidotai*, translated in the King James Version as "betrayed," also means "handed over," which Matthew uses as a theme. The Jewish chief priests were to start the process, but Jesus's mention of crucifixion indicated that the Romans also would be involved. Jesus knew what would happen. His disciples were no doubt shaken by this final announcement. The time that Jesus had been speaking of was about to unfold.

Matthew, as one of the Twelve, had heard Jesus speak of this moment before. In Matthew 16:21, after having given Peter the keys to bind on earth and in heaven, Jesus had begun to show unto His disciples "how that He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day." Peter was understandably alarmed, but Jesus was already in the process of conveying authority to him. Then again, shortly afterwards, in Matthew 17:22–23, following

the Transfiguration, Jesus again told the Twelve that “the Son of man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men: and they will kill him, and he will be resurrected on the third day.” And a third time, in Matthew 20:18–19, Jesus tied the prediction of His death and Resurrection to His entering Jerusalem for the last time, as He told how He would suffer at the hands of the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes.

This would happen at the time of the Feast of Passover, which recalled the sacrifice of a lamb as Jehovah led the Israelites to freedom from slavery in Egypt, but this time Jehovah would make an even “greater sacrifice that would set people free everywhere.”⁷

When Joseph Smith was imprisoned in Liberty Jail in 1839, Jehovah looked back on this very moment in His own life and said: “If thou shouldst be cast in the pit, or into the hands of murderers, and the sentence of death passed upon thee, and . . . if the heavens gather blackness, and all the elements combine to hedge up the way; and above all, if the very jaws of hell shall gape open the mouth wide after thee, know thou, my son, that all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good. The Son of Man hath descended below them all. Art thou greater than he?” (Doctrine and Covenants 122:7–8).

Matthew 26:3–5. Event 19: Caiaphas Calls a Meeting to Plan the Capture and Execution of Jesus

The chief priests and their lawyers—the scribes—assembled at the nearby home of Caiaphas the high priest to conspire how to arrest Jesus by trickery and kill Him. Many of the group were members of the major legal body in Jerusalem, the Great Sanhedrin, but this nighttime meeting was less formal and secretive than a function of that court. They themselves were unsure how things would play out. A month or so earlier, they had previously found Jesus guilty and worthy of death (see John 11:50); all that remained was for them to find Jesus, arrest Him, and execute Him (see John 11:53, 57; 12:10–11). Now they met to see how things would play out. Would they be able to find and arrest Him, now that He was in Jerusalem for His Last Supper? What would happen next? Could they get Pilate to take an interest in this case and execute Jesus as a wonder worker or agitator of the people? Night was approaching, and so they met in Caiaphas’s palace near the temple, as they could not meet at night on temple property. They still needed to get the Pharisees involved, who held a third of the seventy seats on this high court.

They also needed to move quickly. They did not want Jesus to be captured and killed during the fast-approaching Feast of Passover when it could easily cause a riot. Jesus was popular among the general public, and the leaders were afraid of what Jesus might do. Whatever their source, Jesus’s powers were real. Moreover, Rome would not have looked kindly on any riot or uprising in Jerusalem, and Caiaphas and his party could have been relieved of their responsibilities if that happened. Caiaphas had ruled over the Sanhedrin and the temple for over fourteen years, having authority from Rome. His solidarity with Pontius Pilate was crucial. Both of their positions were fragile. A few years later, Caiaphas and Pilate were both removed from office around the same time. It was unclear how the events of this night and the coming morning would play out.

Matthew 26:6–13. Event 20: A Woman Anoints Jesus in Bethany at the Home of Simon the Leper

Meanwhile, Jesus and the disciples were in Bethany at the home of Simon the leper. Jesus was anointed by an unnamed woman who had some very expensive ointment in an alabaster box, an expensive container that had to be broken to open. We do not know exactly what the oil was mixed with. Called *nard* in John 12:1–8, the name was short for *spikenard*. The value of this very costly ointment was perhaps a year’s wages.

In John 12:1–6, John mentions Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, as she anointed Jesus six days before Passover at her family home in Bethany, shortly before Jesus’s entry into Jerusalem (see also John 11:2). Now, here in Matthew 26:2, Matthew reports that *two* days before Passover the rulers in Jerusalem gathered at Caiaphas’s house, and immediately after that, Matthew tells of an anointing by “a woman” at the home of Simon the leper, also in Bethany (26:6). Jesus spent almost all the nights that week in Bethany. Was the home of Simon the leper also the home of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus? Was Simon their father? Was he one of the ten lepers that Jesus had healed? Are Matthew and John speaking of the same event, or did Mary anoint Jesus twice, the first time wiping especially His feet (John 11:2) and the second time anointing his head (Matthew 26:7)? We do not know. Nor do we know why Matthew did not give her name. In any event, the first anointing that week (in Matthew and Mark) may have been a priestly anointing (see, for example, Exodus 29:7) or preparing Jesus for His death and burial (Matthew 26:12; Psalm 23:4–5), while the second anointing (in John) was for His eternal messiahship and kingship.⁸ The Greek word for “to anoint” is *chrstein*.

In the Bible Dictionary, the three accounts in which an unnamed woman anoints Jesus (Matthew 26:2–7, Mark 14:3–9, and Luke 7:36–50) are listed together as though they are to be regarded as one event occurring in Bethany, while John’s account is listed alone at a different time, seemingly to be considered separately. However, this is not the most common view among Latter-day Saint commentaries. James E. Talmage recognized that the accounts in Matthew 26:2–7 and Mark 14:3–9 are the same as the incident in John 12:1–7 that involves Mary. Thus, in his discussion, he combines the details of these three accounts. He is adamant that we must not confuse this account with the account in Luke, which tells of yet another “earlier anointing of Jesus by a penitent sinner in the house of Simon the Pharisee (Luke 7:36–50) in Galilee.”⁹

After the first anointing, mentioned by John, it was only Judas Iscariot who thought the precious lotion should have been sold to give to the poor (John 12:4). But after the second anointing, mentioned by Matthew, the disciples all saw further use of the ointment as wasteful (Matthew 26:8), while Mark says that only some felt that way (Mark 14:4). Perhaps they had not minded the first anointing but then thought that one such expensive anointing should have been sufficient. Jesus criticized the disciples for “reasoning among themselves” about this, neither understanding the importance of these anointings nor recognizing the “beautiful thing” this woman had done for Him (Joseph Smith Translation, Matthew 26:10; Mark 14:6). This woman’s act of service was deeply appreciated by the Savior, and He prophesied that wherever the gospel would be preached the world over, the memory of what this good woman did would be repeated (Matthew 26:13; Mark 14:9). The Gospel writers saw to that.

Matthew 26:14–16. Event 21: Judas Offers and Agrees to Locate and Identify Jesus to the Chief Priests

Judas left the group and went to offer His services to the chief priests shortly after the anointing incident. According to Matthew, Judas essentially asked them, “What will you give me if I deliver him to you?” On Judas’s part, “it was a willful, deliberate, premeditated act.”¹⁰ When they agreed on the price of thirty shekels, Judas agreed and sought an opportunity to hand Jesus over when He was not surrounded by any of the crowds that typically followed Jesus (see Luke 22:6). Judas knew what the chief priests intended, at least partially, as Jesus had already shared in the temple (Matthew 21:45). It is possible that by doing this, Judas expected Jesus to come out in glory with heavenly hosts or in some way to perform a miraculous escape, as He had slipped away from His would-be executioners in Nazareth (see Luke 4:30), but all we know of Judas’s intentions is that he was bitterly disappointed when Jesus was taken and crucified.

Judas was paid, in advance, thirty pieces of silver, about 120 *denarii*, or five months’ daily wages. In the law of Moses, thirty pieces of silver was the price of injury to a slave: “If the ox shall push a manservant or a maidservant; he shall give unto their master thirty shekels of silver, and the ox shall be stoned” (Exodus 21:32). It was also the usual price to buy a slave. This detail was also prophesied in Zechariah 11:12–13: “So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver.”

On this point, the early Christian scholar Origen of Alexandria (ca. 185–254) wrote that people “do the same thing who accept sensual or worldly goods in exchange for handing over and casting out from their souls the Savior and Word of truth who came to dwell with them. . . . People who behave in this way appear openly to be calling out to the powers of the enemy who offer worldly gain in return for the sin of betraying God’s Word, saying, What will you give me if I hand him over to you?”¹¹

Matthew 26:17–25. Event 22: Jesus Celebrates the Last Supper with His Disciples

Jehovah had asked the Israelites to keep the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread as annual reminders of His freeing the Israelite slaves from the Egyptians. However, the foods and activities of the Passover were also designed as messianic symbols, prophetic signs of the sacrifice of Jehovah who was now on the earth as Jesus. Jewish people did not, and still do not, normally recognize that feature. “The slain lamb, the sheltering behind its blood and the eating of its flesh, constituted the *Pesach*, the protection of God’s chosen people beneath the sheltering wings of the Almighty. . . . It was not merely that the Lord passed by the houses of the Israelites, but that He stood on guard, protecting each blood-sprinkled door!”¹²

Most scholars indicate that the Passover meal of Jesus and His Twelve, or the Last Supper, could not technically have been eaten at the same time as the rest of the community. This took place the night before the Crucifixion, which happened on the day before Passover. After Jesus’s arrest, John made a point of the chief priests not going inside the Roman judgment hall to avoid being defiled before eating the Passover

meal the next day (John 18:28). John also noted that it was “the preparation of the Passover, and about the sixth hour” when Pilate took Jesus outside to present Him to the Jewish leadership (John 19:14). John, we know, was an eyewitness at the Crucifixion. By the ninth hour on Friday evening, Jesus would have been sacrificed at the same time as the Passover lamb on the temple altar. In contrast, Matthew covered the incident quite briefly. He placed his emphasis on the traditional symbolisms at this meal.

26:17–19. Go into the city to such a man. Notwithstanding that this was probably happening on the previous evening, the disciples, who apparently knew this part of the plan, asked Jesus where He would like them to prepare for the Passover. Again, as in the loan of a donkey for the triumphal entry, they were asked to approach a certain man, one carrying a pitcher of water, and ask for a guest chamber for the “teacher” to celebrate Passover. Either the man knew ahead, or Jesus was directing this through His seership.

They obtained what is known as the “upper room,” a sacred site for the progression from the earlier covenantal symbols to the updated covenantal symbols. The Mosaic law of sacrificing animals had filled its purpose. The Lamb of God would offer an ultimate sacrifice for all humankind, and He established a means for us to remember and apply this updated covenant.

26:21. One of you will betray me. During the meal, Jesus announced that someone in the room would betray Him, and the disciples were aghast. One by one, they asked, “Surely not I, Lord?” According to Matthew, Jesus said that the one who dipped into the bowl with him would be the traitor. John, who was reputedly reclining nearest Jesus, wrote that Jesus actually dipped a piece of bread into the dish and gave it to Judas, a custom that was indicative of great friendship. Then, according to John, at that point, Satan entered into Judas, and Jesus told Judas to go and do it (what he had contracted to do) quickly, but the others did not realize what “it” was or why Jesus had said this (John 13:27–28). See also Matthew 26:33–35.

Hilary of Poitiers (ca. 315–368) wrote: “As to what He tells Judas, ‘Do what you have to do,’ He authorizes His own betrayal by that very statement. For He who had it within His power to call upon twelve thousand legions of angels (Matthew 26:53) against His betrayers would have found it so much easier to oppose the plans and artifices of one man.”¹³ The Crucifixion had to happen. It was supposed to happen. But “woe unto that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed” (Matthew 26:24). Doing it for the wrong reason and of his own initiative was Judas’s undoing.

Matthew 26:26–30. Event 23: Jesus Institutes the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper

This was a Passover meal, but it was held during the nighttime before Passover rather than later that day, as was typical. Here Jesus brought the new covenant purpose into much sharper focus. In these few short verses, Matthew, along with Mark and Luke, tell how those seated at the meal partook of the broken bread, emblematic of His flesh that was soon to be sacrificed, and they drank the wine as an emblem of His blood, fulfilling the old blood sacrifices offered under the law of Moses for the remission of sins. Here

specific actions with powerful symbolism were established as reminders of Jesus's impending sacrifice and Atonement. It was an ordinance to be carried out until the Savior would come again.

Brigham Young explained: "What are we partaking of these emblems for? In token of our fellowship with him, and in token that we desire to be one with each other, that we may all be one with the Father. His administering these symbols to His ancient disciples, and which He commanded should be done until He came, was for the express purpose that they should witness unto the Father that they did believe in him. But on the other hand, if they did not obey this commandment, they should not be blessed with His spirit."¹⁴

In the Book of Mormon, the resurrected Jesus visited the Nephites at their temple in Bountiful and instituted the same ordinance among them. He explained the purpose of the ordinance, after assuring the Nephites that He would convey the authority necessary to perform it (3 Nephi 18:5).

On that occasion, after His Resurrection, the Savior instructed, "And this shall ye always observe to do, even as I have done, even as I have broken bread and blessed it and given it unto you. And this shall ye do in remembrance of my body, *which I have shown unto you*. And it shall be a *testimony unto the Father* that ye do always remember me. And if ye do always remember me ye shall have my Spirit to be with you." Similarly, with the wine, He added, "Blessed are ye for this thing which ye have done, for this is fulfilling my commandments, and this doth witness unto the Father that ye are *willing to do* that which I have commanded you" (3 Nephi 18:5–7, 10; emphasis added).

From the beginning of the organization of the Restored Church, the Savior provided the precise words to be used in blessing the emblems of the sacrament.¹⁵ He soon authorized the use of water instead of wine (Doctrine and Covenants 27:1–4), which makes the sacrament ordinance more universally possible. The water draws attention to the living Christ, as Jesus offers to all "living water."¹⁶ To members of the Church, the ordinance of the sacrament makes the weekly sacrament meeting sacred and important. "We bring a broken heart and a contrite spirit to our sacrament meeting. It is the highlight of our Sabbath-day observance."¹⁷

Matthew 26:31–32. Sign 9: Jesus Speaks Yet Again of His Death and Resurrection

Though He had covered the doctrinal side of His death through the symbols of the bread and wine, Jesus spoke again of His death and Resurrection, for a fifth time, no doubt to comfort all His followers. He referred to a prophecy saying, "I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered" (Zechariah 13:7), adding that His disciples would be put to shame (*skandalizō*) because of His death and that His followers would be scattered like scorpions (*diaskorpisthēsontai*). He also reassuringly added, "After I am risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee."

Matthew 26:33–35. Event 24: Peter and the Ten Disciples Affirm That They Will Not Deny Him

In the Joseph Smith Translation, Peter says, “Though all my brethren should be offended because of thee, I will never be offended.” Perhaps he should not have overconfidently put himself ahead of others. Joseph Smith also taught, “Many men will say, ‘I will never forsake you, but will stand by you at all times.’ But the moment you teach them some of the mysteries of the kingdom of God that are retained in the heavens and are to be revealed to the children of men when they are prepared for them, they will be the first to stone you and put you to death.”¹⁸ President John Taylor also pointed out, “The Savior doubtless appreciated [Peter’s] feelings, but knowing better than he the frailty of humanity, Jesus said unto him, ‘Verily I say unto thee that this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice.’ Did he? Yes, he did; but Jesus did not get angry with him, nor begin to upbraid him and speak angry words to him. He knew too well the weakness of mortal man, and He knew it before that time.”¹⁹

Matthew 26:36–46. Event 25: Jesus Prays in Gethsemane for Strength to Do the Will of His Father

In the premortal Council, Jesus had committed to taking upon Himself the sins, ills, sufferings, and pains of the world. Of the four New Testament Gospels, Matthew offers the most information about Jesus in Gethsemane. In Matthew 26:39 Jesus first prayed, “O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.” In Matthew 26:42, after Jesus checked on the three waiting disciples, Matthew adds Jesus’s second prayer: “Since this cup may not pass away from me except I drink it, thy will be done.” The third prayer then repeated the same words (Matthew 26:45).

Luke recorded only one prayer. Mark recorded two. Luke also says that an angel came to comfort Jesus. Elder Bruce R. McConkie states that although one cannot be certain, Adam “seems to be the logical one” to be there, now acting in his role as the guardian angel Michael.²⁰ Even with angelic presence, Jesus had to pay the price alone. Perhaps Michael was there to foil any last attempt by Satan to interfere with Jesus accomplishing the Atonement that would overcome for all humanity the effects of the Fall of Adam and Eve.

Between these prayers, Jesus went to check on His chosen three but found that they were asleep. A comment from Farrar is worth noting: “We, as we contemplate it, are like those disciples—our senses are confused, our perceptions are not clear. We can but enter into their amazement and sore distress. Half waking, half oppressed with an irresistible weight of troubled slumber, they only felt that they were dim witnesses of an unutterable agony, far deeper than anything which they could fathom, as it far transcended all that, even in our purest moments, we can pretend to understand.”²¹ Kelly Ogden suggests that they slept because they were drained, physically and spiritually,²² quoting Terry Ball, “During times of great emotional distress and grief, the human body often copes by retreating to sleep.”²³

Luke goes on to report that Jesus knelt down during these prayers and His suffering. Mark says He fell on the ground, while Matthew says He fell on His face. Luke says that Jesus was “in an agony,” which is rather different from what is usually meant by being in agony. In this case, Jesus was engaged in an all-out *agon*, which is a battle or conflict. This eternal struggle was the showdown between the fundamental forces of good and evil. James E. Talmage, pointing out the divine nature of the Savior and His ability to sustain immense suffering, described the effects of the suffering at Gethsemane: “No other man, however great his powers of physical or mental endurance, could have suffered so; for his human organism would have succumbed, and syncope [passing out] would have produced unconsciousness and welcome oblivion.”²⁴

In the end, Jesus knew that He had won, but He also knew that His physical suffering was just beginning and that His mortal time on earth was about to come to an atrocious end.

Matthew 26:47–56. Event 26: Judas Betrays Jesus, Facilitating Jesus’s Arrest

As Jesus triumphed in making the infinite atoning sacrifice in the Garden of Gethsemane, His arrest was already underway. Jesus said, “Arise, let us be going; behold, the one who betrays me is approaching” (Matthew 26:46), and before He had finished speaking, Judas appeared together with a large crowd of arresters (*ochlos polus*). The group, composed of the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders of the people, was armed with “swords and staves [clubs]” (26:47). Matthew uniquely states that this armed party was large. John adds that they were accompanied by a group of Roman soldiers headed by a high-ranking officer (John 18:3).

Earlier Judas had agreed that he would identify Jesus by greeting Him with a kiss, which he now did, while at the same time hailing Jesus respectfully. Judas had unwittingly precipitated the affair so that Jesus would end up dying at the ninth hour on the day of Passover, when the Passover lambs were being sacrificed in the temple, and not on the crowded day of Passover preparation, as Caiaphas would have preferred.

President Joseph F. Smith made the following compassionate assessment of the status of Judas: “To my mind it strongly appears that not one of the disciples possessed sufficient light, knowledge, or wisdom, at the time of the crucifixion, for either exaltation or condemnation; for it was afterwards that their minds were opened to understand the scriptures, and that they were endowed with power from on high; . . . Did Judas possess this light, this witness, this Comforter, this baptism of fire and the Holy Ghost, this endowment from on high? If he did, he received it before the betrayal, and therefore before the other eleven apostles. . . . Not knowing that Judas did commit the unpardonable sin; nor that he was a ‘son of perdition without hope’ who will die the second death, nor what knowledge he possessed by which he was able to commit so great a sin, I prefer, until I know better, to take the merciful view that he may be numbered among those for whom the blessed Master prayed, ‘Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.’”²⁵

26:50. Friend, you are here for this? The King James Version implies that Jesus addressed Judas as “friend” when He asked why he had come, but in the Greek, Jesus calls Judas “colleague” (*hetairos*,

not *philos*). Joseph Smith provided more details about this greeting: “And Jesus said unto him, ‘Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?’ And Jesus also said unto the captain, ‘friend, wherefore art thou come?’” Whereupon the armed group grabbed Jesus with their hands.

26:51–53. *Put your sword back into its place.* Suddenly, one of the disciples (whom John identifies as Peter) put forth his hand, drew his sword, and cut off the ear of one of Caiaphas’s servants. Joseph Smith’s translation reverses the order of the verbs, first drawing the sword and then putting forth his hand. John adds that the servant’s name was Malchus (John 18:10). Luke, the physician, tells us that Jesus healed the ear (Luke 22:51). Luke and John say it was the servant’s right ear. Peter’s impulse may have ramped up the level of fear. But Luke and Joseph Smith added that Jesus “put forth His hand and touched the servant’s ear and it was healed.” This detail makes one wonder how Jesus’s assailants, especially Caiaphas, could have processed and disregarded such a charitable miracle and not have softened their hearts toward Jesus.

Latter-day Saint commentaries focus first on the enormous power that Jesus could have commanded to avoid the arresting party and then on the voluntary surrender that was necessary to accomplish His mission. James E. Talmage wrote, “The Savior’s question, ‘Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will now give me more than twelve legions of angels?’ [Matthew 26:53] was intended to emphasize the fact that He was submitting voluntarily and in accordance with foreseen and predicted development.”²⁶ Andrew Skinner comments on a large number of angels and their effect on the hearers: “What an army of angelic warriors that would have been! Twelve legions of angels—seventy-two thousand heavenly warriors with incomprehensible power at their disposal.”²⁷ (The chief subdivision of the Roman Imperial army in first-century Judea was a legion, which was approximately six-thousand foot soldiers plus accompanying cavalry.)

26:54. *How then would the scriptures be fulfilled?* The Savior’s purpose was not to destroy those around Him. Andrew Skinner explains, “Rather, He wanted to carry out the supreme saving mission of the Father and thus fulfill the scriptures.”²⁸

26:55. *As you would against a robber?* Jesus asked, “Why do you treat me like a robber?” This suggests that He is an outlaw with no legal rights in the minds of those in the arresting party. The Greek term *lēstēs* commonly means “robber, bandit,” or in modern language, even “gangster.” Josephus used this term to describe revolutionaries in a social or political context in first-century AD Palestine.²⁹ If they had classified Jesus as a robber for legal purposes, a normal trial would not have been conducted because robbers had no rights, so punishing Him without an arraignment or hearing would have been legally understandable. In the eyes of these accusers, Jesus could call down His henchmen from heaven to assist him, as they had credible reports that Jesus used supernatural forces on other occasions. At the same time, Jesus knew that everything was happening in this very manner so that “the writings of the prophets may be fulfilled,” as Matthew characteristically adds from his Israelite perspective (Matthew 26:56).

Matthew 26:57–68. Challenge 14: Are You the Christ, the Son of God?

By way of a stop at the home of Caiaphas's father-in-law (see John 18:5), Jesus was then taken to the estate of Caiaphas, where the scribes and elders had already gathered in anticipation of the arrest. Members of the Great Sanhedrin were there.

This holding tactic was not staged in the Sanhedrin's regular meeting place, and in fact, the events and accusations in the various ensuing hearings do not follow any of the standard judicial procedures. This is understandable for several reasons: Caiaphas now needed to stall for time to give Pilate time to wake up and be ready to receive Caiaphas and Jesus, as Caiaphas must have scheduled in advance. Second, Jesus had already been found "worthy of death" by the Sanhedrin (John 11:50, 53); all that remained was for them to capture Jesus and then decide by whom and how Jesus should be executed. So a full, regular trial to determine guilt was not necessary. Third, no one knew how these events would unfold, and people were on pins and needles. Moreover, people were afraid of the crowd, of the Romans, and of Jesus's powers. "When people become confused, they often become afraid. When they become afraid, they act irrationally. Although the factors of fear in the accounts of Jesus's trials and execution are rarely mentioned by commentators, fear provided the driving undercurrent that best explains the irregularities and vagaries of the so-called trial of Jesus. His trial was not a rational affair. Fear played a much larger role than is often appreciated."³⁰

One underlying and commonly shared fear—the fear associated with magic or the supernatural—may have played a much more instrumental role in this case than is usually thought. Everyone in this story was afraid of this. To all people, it was apparent that Jesus's powers were either extraordinarily good or extremely bad. Failing, however, to recognize the goodness of the results of Jesus's powers, Caiaphas and his inner circle were desperate to defend their turf. A great sense of risk and urgency prevailed.

Not much happened next, according to all four Gospels. Two witnesses were normally required under the law of Moses to establish any claim or cause of action (see Deuteronomy 19:15), but Caiaphas had difficulty finding any credible witnesses against Jesus, especially in the wee hours of the morning, on any legal cause of action. The best they could do was to find two men who claimed that Jesus had said, "I am able to destroy this temple of God and to rebuild it in three days" (Matthew 26:60). To this, Jesus offered no response. Remaining silent in such a situation, under Jewish law, was actually a form of confession of culpability, as no right to remain silent existed in those days.

In this tense atmosphere, Caiaphas took the next step. He "adjured" Jesus, meaning that he required Him to answer, under oath (*exorkizo*), a direct question in the hearing of all who were present: "I adjure thee, by the living God, that you tell us whether you are 'the Christ [the Messiah], the Son of God'" (26:63). Notice that Caiaphas did not ask Jesus if He was "the Son of David," as Jesus had often called Himself. Claiming to be the Son of God was a much more serious matter.

Jesus did not answer yes or no but said to all present, "Hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming on the clouds of heaven" (26:64). Under these circumstances,

Caiaphas tore his official robes, claimed that Jesus had blasphemed, and stated that no further witnesses were needed (26:65). While blasphemy was a capital offense (see Leviticus 24), this usually required the speaker to say the name of God out loud. Jesus had not done that, so Caiaphas turned the question over to the entire council.

In the King James Version, Caiaphas said, “What think ye?” and the council replied, “He is guilty of death.” In the Greek it reads, “How does it seem to you?” This was not a well-formulated allegation. And the response, at least of some, was, “He is worthy of death,” but this still does not amount to an actual court verdict.

Jesus, knowing that the time for His terrible death was at hand, had given the council enough to move ahead with. And yet, none of them had actually accused Him of anything. By the grace of the Savior, they had unwittingly found a way to move God’s will forward without shouldering the direct weight of sentencing Him.

Matthew 26:69–75. Event 27: Peter Denies Three Times That He Knows or Was with Jesus

Meanwhile, as all of that was going on in Caiaphas’s mansion, Peter sat outside trying not to be noticed. In Matthew 26:70, 72, and 74, Peter denied three times that he knew Jesus the Galilean, Jesus of Nazareth, or that man, as Jesus had foretold at the Last Supper only a few hours before (Matthew 26:34). Several points are worth noting here.

In the Greek, Peter used a different word than Jesus did when He had prophesied this development. Jesus used *aparneomai*, which means “to repudiate or renounce.” This is a very strong word of denial. However, in describing what Peter did, Matthew used *arneomai* two times (26:70, 72), a milder word that usually means “to disclaim or disavow” but stops short of “repudiating” or “denying.” It could even mean “to turn a gift down.” However, when Peter acknowledged what he had done, he himself used the harsher word, as Jesus had used (26:75).

Was Jesus asking Peter to deny Him? President Spencer W. Kimball felt that Jesus wanted Peter to do this so that he would not be put to death and could go on to become the leader of the Church for the next thirty years.³¹ In any event, Peter’s reaction by the fire was probably not deliberate. He was truly sorry and wept bitterly over the situation, and he realized that all of Jesus’s prophecies would come true.

Of course, Peter did not deny that Jesus was the Messiah. He only denied knowing Him or being one of His associates. His denial was not strong enough to condemn him. But Peter’s situation causes us to ask ourselves, how often do we deny Christ in our lives by saying less than we know and less than we should? Thomas S. Monson taught: “What we say and how we say it tend to reflect what we are. In the life of the Apostle Peter, when he attempted to distance himself from Jesus and pretended to be other than what he was, his tormenters detected his true identity with the penetrating statement, ‘Thy speech betrayeth thee.’ The words we utter will reflect the feelings of our hearts, the strength of our character, and the

depth of our testimonies.”³² We should never shy away from opportunities to be a witness for Christ. And we must be on guard, for, as may be said, we are closest to sin when we think we are farthest from it.

Matthew 27:1–2. Event 28: The Chief Priests and Elders Decide to Deliver Jesus to Pilate

Modern readers have difficulty understanding the pervasive roles and driving fears associated with unseen spirits, demons, powers, names, curses, miracles, and wonders in the world of the New Testament. But awareness of this factor brings into focus an overlooked dynamic in the legal proceedings against Jesus before the Jews and the Romans. The Jewish chief priests were deeply concerned about Jesus’s wonderworking and therefore considered Him worthy of death under biblical law, which made it a capital offense to engage in various forms of improper magic and, especially, to use miraculous signs or wonders to deceive people or to lead them into apostasy (see Deuteronomy 13:1–5). This concern stood behind many reactions to Jesus’s miracles, especially His raising of Lazarus from the dead (John 11:50–58).

With the council’s decision to execute Jesus, it makes sense that the chief priests would take Jesus to Pilate for tactical reasons, in the hope that under Roman law he would find Jesus guilty of sedition (*crimen maiestatis*) through illicit magical wonderworking (*maleficium*). That would ensure that the Roman procurator, Pontius Pilate, would at least share the blame if any should arise.

Matthew 27:3–10. Event 29: Judas Repents, Throws Back the Silver, and Hangs Himself

Whether or not Judas had realized earlier that the chief priests intended to kill Jesus, that fact became apparent as they bound Jesus and led him away. The King James Version says that Judas “repented himself,” but the Greek word *metamelētheis* does not usually mean “to repent”; instead it means “to feel remorse, regret, or to feel sorry.” Judas tried to return the thirty shekels to the chief priests, saying, “I sinned because I betrayed innocent blood.” But they responded, “What do we care? That is your responsibility” (Matthew 27:4). He threw the money into the temple, left, and after hanged himself (27:5).

Jerome (ca. 347–420) wrote, “The weight of Judas’ impiety overshadowed the magnitude of his avarice [greed]. Seeing the Lord condemned to death, he brought the money to the priests as if it were in his power to change the sentence of Christ’s persecutors. Although he would change his mind eventually, he could not change the consequence of his first decision.”³³

27:4. Thy sins be upon thee. Joseph Smith added to Matthew 27:4 the words spoken to Judas, “Thy sins be upon thee.” The conspirators had no concern for Judas’s desire to repent, and they openly condemned him for his sins but did not consider their own sins, where were many. In a similar case, the

Prophet Joseph taught that “David sought repentance at the hand of God carefully, with tears for the murder of Uriah, but he could only get it [by going] through hell; he got a promise that his soul should not be left in hell.”³⁴

27:5. After he went away, he hanged himself. One cannot know what went through Judas’s mind. He may have thought that the time was right for Jesus to come forth as the promised Messiah to liberate the Jewish nation. He might have hoped that Jesus would call down legions of angels (26:53). He may have thought that Jesus sent him to do that which he had agreed to do. Whatever the case, Judas was bitterly disappointed and immediately took his own life. What if he had waited three days?

Opinions regarding suicide varied in Jesus’s day, as Grant R. Osborne explains: “Suicide was looked down on by the Jews, but the Romans thought it an honorable death that in some way could atone for the serious errors made, and many Jews accepted this; but even with the Romans, hanging was a dishonorable [act]. In fact, hanging was the legal penalty for capital offenses (Deuteronomy 21:22–23), and the guilty person was thought to be under God’s curse.”³⁵

27:7. The purchase of a potter’s field. The thirty pieces of silver and the purchase of a potter’s field fulfilled a prophecy by Zechariah, not by Jeremiah, as Matthew said. Words of Zechariah read: “And I said unto them, If ye think good, give me my price; and if not, forbear. So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver. And the Lord said unto me, cast it unto the potter: a goodly price that I was prised at of them. And I took the thirty pieces of silver, and cast them to the potter in the house of the Lord” (Zechariah 11:12–13). It is possible that Jeremiah said something similar that we do not have record of. Jeremiah, in an entirely different situation, bought a field—legally, visibly, and with a witnessed contract—for seventeen shekels of silver in order to demonstrate that as God had said, “houses and fields and vineyards shall be possessed again in this land” upon the return of the Jews from captivity (Jeremiah 32:6–9).

Matthew 27:11–14. Challenge 15: Are You the King of the Jews?

According to John, Pilate initially had little interest in the case of Jesus. He asked the Jews what they were accusing Him of, and they said that He had been found doing evil (*kakon poiōn*), being an evildoer (*kakopoios*), or being a malefactor. Doing *kakon*, which was to work with magic or cast spells, was a crime throughout the ancient world. But Pilate simply responded to the Jewish leaders, “Then take him, and judge him according to your law,” to which they answered, “It is not lawful for us to put any man to death” (Matthew 18:31). That apparently referred to Roman restrictions, yet that limitation was not strictly observed, for the Sanhedrin stoned Stephen without Roman permission only a couple years later after accusing him of blasphemy (Acts 7:58), and on several previous occasions people had sought to kill Jesus on various charges without Roman permission.³⁶

But on this occasion, Caiaphas sought Roman participation, and Matthew picks up the narrative again when Pilate began questioning Jesus. His first question was politically charged: “Are you the King of the

Jews?” (27:11). The Greek text of Matthew says that Jesus simply replied, “Thou sayest.” However, the inspired version by Joseph Smith expands that to read: “Thou sayest truly; for thus it is written of me” (Joseph Smith Translation, Matthew 27:12).

The arresting group then lodged their accusations against Jesus; but to Pilate’s great amazement, Jesus made no reply. So, Pilate asked Him if He had any idea how many things they were accusing him of, but Jesus still declined to answer. Pilate probably had never seen an accused person act this way, going as a lamb to the slaughter, and Matthew lets Jesus’s simple silence stand.

John, however, records a very touching and open conversation between Jesus and Pilate when Jesus went on to explain His otherworldly kingship, after which Pilate went out to the accusers and said that he found in Jesus no fault at all (John 18:38). Indeed, as Jesus explained, “If my kingship were of this world, my servants would fight, that I might not be handed over” (John 18:36). When people wanted to make Jesus a king in this world, He fled (John 6:15).

Matthew also recorded nothing about Jesus being taken before Herod Antipas, which was a harrowing experience recorded only by Luke. While that involvement with Galilean and gentile political elements was interesting to Luke, that sidetrack was not relevant to Matthew’s focus on Jewish law, prophecy, and priesthood.

Matthew 27:15–17. Event 30: Pilate Offers to Release Barabbas or Jesus

All four Gospels include an account of how the crowd came to ask for the release of Barabbas, a revolutionary robber, instead of Jesus. Not much is known about this Passover practice. Matthew and Mark indicate that this was a new custom that Pilate had allowed (Matthew 27:15; Mark 15:6), whereas John says that Pilate did this as a Jewish custom (John 18:39). As Origen (ca.185–254) explained, this may have been a fairly new practice granted to the Jews by the Romans: “Shortly after Roman rule had begun [in Palestine], the Jews who came under their yoke were granted the privilege of asking for [the release of] one [prisoner] whom they wanted, even though he appeared to be guilty of a thousand murders; the pagan nations granted a certain amount of leniency to their subjects until the yoke had been firmly secured around them.”³⁷

Perhaps Pilate was thinking that people would surely prefer to have Barabbas and two other violent brigands crucified. Barabbas and the two men who were crucified along with Jesus were described as *lēstai* (“robbers, bandits, or revolutionaries”) in Matthew 27:38, 44 as well as in Mark 15:27 and John 18:40. Barabbas was in prison for having murdered people in an insurrection against Rome (Mark 15:7). Thus, Pilate gave the crowd the choice between freeing Jesus or Barabbas. After all, Pilate’s wife told him not to have anything to do with harming Jesus, an innocent man, as she had had a terrifying dream on account of Jesus (Matthew 27:19). But the chief priests and elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas instead of Jesus (27:20).

Ironically, the name Barabbas meant “son of the father” in Aramaic. The Aramaic word *bar* meant son, and *abba* meant father. According to tradition, the given name of Barabbas was Yehoshua, or Yeshua, the same as the Savior’s name, Jesus. An ancient textual variant of Matthew 27:16–17 preserves that full name, Jesus Barabbas, and the early church theologian Origen implied that the full name appeared in most of the manuscripts of his day. With this in mind, one can understand how there might even have been confusion if some in the crowd were calling for the release of Jesus the Son of God and others yelled out for Jesus (Yeshua) the Son of the Father (Bar-abbas).

Matthew 27:18. Event 31: Pilate Is Convinced of Jesus’s Innocence

Matthew says that Pilate was amazed at how Jesus answered, and at the same time failed to answer, his questions. He had never seen an accused person act this way. Jesus acted with characteristic Roman respect, dignity, self-control, and self-restraint. According to Matthew 27:18, Pilate believed that the chief priests had delivered Jesus to him because of their envy of Him, no doubt because of His popularity. It is not clear how anyone knew what Pilate was thinking. Perhaps he later said something to this effect, or it may have been hearsay.

According to John 18:38 the chief priests accused Jesus of blasphemy and of breaking other Jewish laws, but Pilate would not enforce Jewish law. So, they tried to add the Roman crimes of sedition and refusing to pay taxes to the Romans, and they encouraged Pilate to beware of Jesus’s powers. Matthew, however, emphasized only the divine aspects of the titles and actions of Jesus as the factors that led to His death.

Pilate apparently did not place weight on the accusation of Jesus’s breaking the Roman law of *maiestas* (treason) or of His involvement in *maleficia* (a common Roman legal term for illegal witchcraft or magic that caused harm). He did not accept that Jesus had broken Roman law. However, Pilate was very reluctant to just let Jesus go, an act that would have severely offended the Jewish leaders who were Roman allies. But many people really loved Jesus, and Pilate sensed a riot brewing. Either option would have caused great difficulties for Rome. Pilate was not in a strong political position back in Rome, and he knew that one more incident would probably end his rather brutal career. He was expected to keep the Jewish people calm and prevent riots. *Catholic Encyclopedia* comments that the canonical Gospels tended to stress the efforts of Pilate to acquit Christ “and thus pass as lenient a judgment as possible upon his crime.”³⁸ In Acts 3:13, Luke stated that Pilate had even been determined to let Jesus go.

Matthew 27:19. Event 32: Pilate’s Wife Warns Him to Have Nothing to Do with Jesus

The incident of Pilate’s wife proclaiming Jesus’s innocence is recorded only in Matthew. While Pilate was seated on the official judgment seat trying to solve this issue, his wife sent him a message warning him not

to have anything to do with harming that “innocent man.” She felt strongly that Jesus was innocent, just, or righteous, and she “had suffered a lot in a dream on account of him.” She also had apparently no concern about boldly offering her opinion to her husband at this critical moment in his career. Joseph Smith changed the word “dream” (in the King James Version) to “vision,” perhaps to bring out the spiritual connotations of her experience. She acted on a prompting, which is what we are frequently reminded to do.

Elder Bruce R. McConkie said, “There are times—not a few in the course of a life—when men would do well to give heed to the wise counsel of their wives. If ever there was such a time in the life of Pilate, this was it.”³⁹

Whether or not Pilate and his wife became Christians is not really known, but according to some of the apocryphal Gospels, they eventually were classified so. The belief that Pilate’s wife became a Christian goes back to Origen, who suggested not only that the vision was from God but also that the dream was given that she may become converted.⁴⁰ The Roman Catholic Church does not recognize them as saints, but the Abyssinian Orthodox Church considers both Pilate and his wife as official saints and assigns June 25 for their saints day. The Greek Orthodox Church considers Pilate’s wife a saint and assigns October 27 to her.⁴¹

As for the name of Pilate’s wife, there is no information in the scriptures, only in non-Biblical Roman texts. The earliest available use of the name Procle appears in one translation of the apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus.⁴² *Catholic Encyclopedia* refers to her as Claudia.⁴³ Latter-day Saint commentators tend to be very cautious about the name of Pilate’s wife.

Matthew 27:20–23. Event 33: The Crowd Responds Three Times Calling for Jesus to Be Crucified

Pilate asked the crowd which of the two prisoners, Jesus or Barabbas, he should release. This was at the option of the Jewish leaders, and if they had agreed to let Jesus go, Pilate would have been free of a very difficult political decision. Matthew says that after the crowd opted for Barabbas, Pilate called out, “Then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Christ?” (Matthew 27:11). Mark adds, “Whom you call the King of the Jews.” Matthew says they answered, “Let him be crucified” (27:22) without saying who should carry out that execution. Mark and Luke have the crowd order Pilate to “crucify him” (Mark 15:13; Luke 23:21).

Hilary of Poitiers (ca. 315–368) wrote: “They chose the one elected for damnation over the author of life.”⁴⁴

When Pilate asked what Jesus had done to deserve the death penalty, the crowd shouted again, *de perissōs* (“exceedingly, beyond measure, or all the more”), “Let him be crucified!” Pilate asked three times, each in a different way, trying to encourage the other choice, but they continued firm in their decision. This was also in fulfillment of prophecy in the Book of Mormon: “But because of priestcrafts and iniquities, they at Jerusalem will stiffen their necks against him, that He be crucified” (2 Nephi 10:5). Luke confirmed in Acts 3:13 that “the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers,

hath glorified His Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go.”

D. Kelly Ogden and Andrew C. Skinner have written, “All real disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ must answer Pilate’s question in their own lives: ‘What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ?’”⁴⁵

Matthew 27:24. Event 34: Pilate Washes His Hands to Quell a Riot

Pilate observed that the crowd was about to cause a riot, so his solution was to pass Jesus back to the Jewish leadership and to declare “I am innocent of this man’s blood. It is your responsibility,” whereupon he publicly and symbolically washed his hands of the guilt.

Commentators, both Protestant and Latter-day Saint, refer to Pilate’s handwashing action as performance of a Jewish ritual. Andrew C. Skinner suggested that Pilate would have had Jewish culture in mind as he performed the rite in an effort to “make a dramatic impression on Jewish leaders,” but there are several examples in ancient Greek and Roman texts of washing as a symbol that demonstrates absolving oneself of guilt or responsibility for the death of another.⁴⁶

For example, in Roman writings, there is a very explicit example in the *Aeneid* in which Virgil’s hero, Aeneas, proclaims, “Now you, father, take up the gods of our ancestral home, our holy symbols. I cannot touch them without sin, until I have washed my hands in a living spring, for coming as I do straight from the fury of war; I have fresh blood still on them.”⁴⁷ Pilate surely knew of these traditions and was applying his knowledge politically.

Latter-day Saint leaders use Pilate’s handwashing to point out that ceremony alone is not a moral or spiritual cleansing. No amount of ceremonial washing could free Pilate of responsibility for Jesus’s execution. Neal A. Maxwell crystallized this thought as follows: “Pilate sought to refuse responsibility for deciding about Christ, but Pilate’s hands were never dirtier than just after he had washed them.”⁴⁸ Thomas S. Monson spoke similarly: “One called Pontius Pilate washed his hands of this man called King of the Jews. Oh foolish, spineless Pilate! Did you really believe that water could cleanse such guilt?”⁴⁹ A little more gently, President Spencer W. Kimball asked: “Could the Lord forgive Pilate? Certainly, He could not without Pilate’s repentance. Did Pilate repent? We do not know what Pilate did after the scripture drops him. He had a desire to favor the Savior. He did not display full courage in resisting the pressures of the people. . . . We leave Pilate to the Lord as we do all other sinners, but remember that ‘to know and not to do’ is sin.”⁵⁰

Matthew 27:25. Event 35: All the Crowd Affirms with an Oath the Execution of Jesus

The chief priests, elders, and all the people that were present were adamant that Jesus should be crucified and confirmed it with a bone-chilling oath, a curse upon themselves: “His blood be on us, and on our

children.” However, when a person in that day said, “His blood be upon us,” all they were saying from a legal perspective is, “We certify that we are telling the truth. You can take us seriously.” Pilate should have had good reasons not to trust them, but this idiom validated their oath or their testimony to Pilate, and it should not be extended beyond that one purpose.

Pope Benedict XVI’s comment approaches the oath from a view of Christ’s Atonement. “When in Matthew’s account the whole people say: “His blood be on us and on our children” (Matthew 27:25), the Christian will remember that Jesus’ blood speaks a different language from the blood of Abel (Hebrews 12:24): it does not cry out for vengeance and punishment; it brings reconciliation. It is not poured out against anyone; it is poured out for many, for all.”⁵¹

This crowd did not represent all the Jews, of course. There were many who loved Jesus. All His disciples were Jewish, and He Himself was Jewish. As Pope Benedict XVI wrote, “Matthew’s account [Matthew 27:25], speaks of ‘all the people,’ and attributes to them the demand for Jesus’ crucifixion. Matthew is certainly not recounting historical fact here: How could the whole people have been present at that moment to clamor for Jesus’ death. . . . The real group of accusers are the current Temple authorities, joined in the context of the Passover amnesty by the ‘crowd’ of Barabbas supporters.”⁵²

Though the whole population of Jerusalem was not represented in that small courtyard, Jewish people have suffered over the ages and across the world for a widespread opinion that “they killed Jesus.” In decisively rejecting that antisemitic slur, one should remember that Peter would say, only a few weeks later, to those very people in Jerusalem “who had killed the Prince of life, . . . I [know] that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers” (Acts 3:15, 17). Jesus forgave people as He hung on the cross, forgiving whom He would; and, thus, of us also it is required that we forgive all people. “Whereas God will judge, we are to judge not. Placing blame is not part of this picture. Masterfully understating all that happened, all Jesus said, out of the darkness to the Nephites, was, ‘I came unto my own, and my own received me not’ (3 Nephi 9:16). Let us never forget that we also reject and crucify Jesus anew whenever we partake of the world and its darkness.”⁵³

Matthew 27:26. Event 36: Pilate Releases Barabbas

Matthew records that Pilate then released Barabbas to the people. There is no record of where Barabbas went or what he did. Jesus was flogged, and then He was handed over to be crucified. His treatment was prophesied by Isaiah: “I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting” (Isaiah 50:6).

Roman soldiers commonly flogged the accused as a punishment, though flogging was also used to elicit a confession. “It was a horrible, flesh-ripping experience that hastened the death of those about to be crucified. The victim was tied to a post or forced to the ground. The scourge (*flagrum*) was a short whip that had several leather thongs with lead balls and sharp pieces of bone or metal attached to them.”⁵⁴ In some

cases, flogging continued on the way to the place of crucifixion,⁵⁵ and in some instances, the accused was dead or very close to it by the time they were attached to the cross.

Matthew 27:27–30. Event 37: The Soldiers Mock Jesus by Hailing Him King of the Jews

Notice, however, that Jesus was not handed directly to the Jews. Matthew recorded that the Roman soldiers took Jesus inside the governor’s Jerusalem residence—Pilate normally lived in Caesarea—and “gathered the whole unit of soldiers against him” (Matthew 27:27). The soldiers provided him with accoutrements of a pretend king and mocked him viciously.

According to Matthew, they stripped Him and put a red robe on Him. The red robe may have been an easily available soldier’s cape used for mockery. Mark and John, however, record that they dressed Him in purple, a symbol of royalty (John 19:2). Joseph Smith’s translation of Matthew 27:30 changes the “red” to “purple,” perhaps for the sake of consistency. Either color would have provided the sarcastic mockery of His kingship. George M. Lamsa pointed out, “It is a common custom in the East for kings and princes to confer royal garments upon their brave and distinguished men. . . . When king Ahaseuerus honored Mordecai, he commanded Haman to bring the royal apparel and place it on him.”⁵⁶ Here, they were doing it in mockery. They made a crown of thorns, which would serve as both a victor’s wreath (again, sarcastically) and a crown to mock His kingship as well as an instrument of torture, and Matthew alone records that they made Him a scepter from reeds to mock His authority. They bowed before Him in mockery of praise and worship and then spat on Him and hit Him with the reed scepter.

Eugene Boring indicated, “In contrast to the homage paid the true king of the Jews by the magi (Matthew 2:11), Jesus was greeted by being spit upon and struck, and in contrast to the universal practice of kingship in this world, the true king received violence rather than inflicting it.”⁵⁷

After the soldiers had finished this process of mocking Him, they replaced His clothes and led Him off to Golgotha. Thus, Matthew portrays the Romans as solely responsible for the actual execution. James M. Freeman wrote, “Capital punishment among the Jews were executed outside the boundaries of camps or the walls of cities. See Leviticus 24:14; Numbers 15:35–36; 1 Kings 21:13; Acts 7:58. The Romans also observed the same custom, particularly in the crucifixion of malefactors.”⁵⁸

Matthew 27:31–38. Event 38: Jesus and Two Robbers Are Hung on Three Wooden Crossbeams

We do not know whether Jesus was being flogged on His way to Golgotha (see my discussion of Matthew 27:26), but considering His suffering at Gethsemane and then the whipping, beating, tormenting, and the loss of blood as well as lack of sleep He faced during all that night, He would already have been physically

exhausted if He were a mere mortal. Leon Morris points out that it was very unlikely for the soldiers to have allowed Jesus any help unless He had really needed it.⁵⁹

The soldiers then forced a man from Cyrene named Simon to carry the cross for Jesus. It is unclear whether Simon saw this as a huge honor at that moment or not. He likely had no choice. But who, besides the Jewish leadership and the Roman soldiers, would not have helped Jesus? It is not told whether Simon was a Christian, a Gentile, a Jew of the diaspora in Jerusalem to celebrate Passover, or a permanent local resident.

As the crowd neared the place of execution, Matthew records that someone “offered him wine mixed with gall to drink.” Jesus tasted it but refused to drink it. There are at least two ways to understand this offering. If it had been wine mixed with vinegar or any other bitter element, it may have been intended as a cruel joke. On the other hand, the drink may have been laced with bitter drugs to alleviate the pain. A passage in the much later Talmud discussed such offerings: “When one is led out to execution, he is given a goblet of wine containing a grain of frankincense, in order to benumb his senses, for it is written, ‘Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto the bitter in soul’ (Proverbs 31:6). And it has also been taught that the noble women in Jerusalem used to donate and bring it.”⁶⁰ Jesus may have refused such a kind gift in order to remain lucid and able to speak from the cross.⁶¹

Crucifixion was the standard mode of public execution for criminals who were a disgrace or danger to Roman control. It was the cruelest and most drawn out of all methods of execution. David Turner expressed a common view: “The Romans used it in the case of slaves, notorious criminals, and insurrectionists to make a political statement. Crucifixion asserted the dominion of Rome over conquered peoples by making a gruesome example of anyone who dared upset the *pax Romana*—the peace of Rome.”⁶² To quote Cicero, “Wretched is the ignominy of public judgment.”⁶³

Jesus’s crossbeam was positioned between those of two other malefactors—*kakourgoi* as they are called in Luke 23:32. Jesus felt as though He was being treated like a robber (Matthew 26:55). The two men beside him were not common thieves but were called *lēstai*, a word meaning “robbers” that was used for gangs, serious criminals, or rebels. The placement of Jesus between these two can evoke the words of Isaiah: “He was numbered with the transgressors; and He bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors” (Isaiah 53:12).

27:37. *What I have written, I have written.* This verse explaining the placing of a title on the cross was expanded by Joseph Smith: “And Pilate wrote a title, and put it on the cross, and the writing was, JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS, in letters of Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew. And the chief priest said unto Pilate, it should be written and set up over His head this accusation, this is he that said he was JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS. But Pilate answered and said, What I have written, I have written; let it alone.” These changes in the Joseph Smith Translation harmonize Matthew’s verse with the other Gospel accounts.

Matthew 27:39–44. Event 39: The People, Chief Priests, Scribes, and Elders Mock Jesus

Once Jesus was raised up on the cross, passersby began to hurl insults at Him, saying that if He could destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, He should be able to save Himself. “If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross!” These mockers reproduced Satan’s catcalling in Matthew 4:3, using the same taunting phrase, “If thou be the Son of God.” This mocking added to the Savior’s suffering.

Likewise, the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders mocked him, saying, “He saved others; himself he cannot save,” taunting him saying “If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him” (Matthew 27:42).

Even the robbers who were crucified with Him tormented Him. Joseph Smith modified the verse, saying (changes in italics), “*One of the thieves also, which were crucified with Him, cast the same in His teeth. But the other rebuked him, saying, Dost thou not fear God, seeing thou art under the same condemnation; and this man is just and hath not sinned; and he cried unto the Lord, that he would save him. And the Lord said unto him, this day thou shalt be with me in Paradise.*” Joseph’s translation again harmonizes Matthew’s testimony with that of the other Gospels.

Matthew 27:45–50. Event 40: Jesus Quoted Psalm 22:1 and Cried Again and Yielded Up His Spirit

At about the ninth hour, 3:00 p.m. our time, Jesus cried out loudly, “*Eli, Eli lema sabachthani,*” which means, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” Some thought Jesus was calling for Elijah to save Him. Over the years, commentators have shared ideas on the meaning of this particular phrase, but more meaningful is to notice that Jesus is reciting the opening words of Psalm 22, which is clearly a messianic psalm. Indeed, many events in Jesus’s Crucifixion are prophesied in Psalm 22 in remarkable detail, as Shon Hopkin has detailed in *BYU Studies Quarterly*.

22:1 “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?” Quoted in Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34; see also the Gospel of Peter 5:19, an early text in the New Testament Apocrypha.

22:7–8 “All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the Lord that He would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing He delighted in him.” Quoted in Matthew 27:39–43; Mark 15:29–32; Luke 23:35–39; Gospel [of] Peter 3:6–9.

22:15 “My tongue cleaveth to my jaws.” See John 19:28, “I thirst.”

22:16 “They pierced my hands and my feet.” Quoted in Gospel of Peter 4:13–14. See also Luke 24:39; 1 Nephi 19:10; Mosiah 3:9; 3 Nephi 11:14.

22:18 “They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture.” Quoted in Matt 27:35; Mark 15:24; Luke 23:34; John 19:23–24; Gospel [of] Peter 4:12.⁶⁴

Readers often think that Jesus was in complete despair when He cried out, “My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?” And certainly, He was in the final throes of unimaginable pain and suffering. But those words were also just the beginning of this psalm, which ends not in defeat but in victory: “All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee. For the kingdom is the Lord’s” (Psalm 22:27–28). Just as hymns today are known by their opening line, calling out the opening line of Psalm 22 would have brought to Jewish minds the rest of that hymn. Likewise, when we hear the words “Come, come, ye Saints,” we know that even though the hymn will wade through hardships, toils, and even death, it will end in joy: “Happy day, all is well.” Likewise here, by hearing Jesus speak this opening line of Psalm 22, many in the crowd would have remembered how it victoriously ends.

Psalm 22 is indeed amazingly prophetic. Less than two months after the Crucifixion, Peter spoke of how Jesus had been killed and then raised up, according to the eternal plan and foreknowledge of God (Acts 2:23–24), all of which King David had spoken of (Acts 2:25). Indeed, in Psalm 22, David revealed many of the details of Jesus’s suffering and death, including its conclusion: “Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, . . . thou shalt make me full of joy” (Acts 2:27–28, quoting Psalm 16:8–11). One wonders what some of the perpetrators of Jesus’s death might have felt as they heard Him begin to sing Psalm 22, having just fulfilled such an ugly prophesy.

Similarly, when Joseph Smith was in Liberty Jail, he too cried out, “O God, where art thou? And where is the pavilion that covereth thy hiding place? How long shall thy hand be stayed?” (Doctrine and Covenants 121:1). And the Lord Himself, who personally understood, immediately offered Joseph comfort: “My son, peace be unto thy soul; thine adversity and thine afflictions shall be but a small moment; and then, if thou endure it well, God shall exalt thee on high; thou shalt triumph over all thy foes (Doctrine and Covenants 121:7–8).

Matthew 27:51–54. Sign 10: The Earth Quakes and Dead Raised to Witness of Jesus as the Son of God

From noon until three in the afternoon, unexplainable darkness fell over all the land. Jesus cried out aloud once more, and then His spirit left His body. Matthew recorded three very dramatic, powerful events. Immediately, there was a large earthquake that split the rocks; the veil of the temple was ripped from top to bottom; and then three days later, “the bodies of many saints who had died were resurrected.”

27:51. The torn veil. The curtain that was torn closed off the Holy of Holies from the entry chamber, the *Hekal*. Only the high priest could enter the Holy of Holies and only on the Day of Atonement. The high priest and the chief priests would certainly have considered the rending of the veil to be a catastrophe, as it would leave their Holy of Holies unprotected. They had rejected the Christ while He had opened the blessings of righteousness and holiness to all. According to Bruce R. McConkie, the death of the Savior

completed the requirements of the Atonement, and the way was now available to all people to reach the “highest and holiest of places, that kingdom where eternal life is found.”⁶⁵ Modern revelation refers to the veil being rent in reference to the veil that blocks man’s eyes from heavenly people and divine events: “The veil shall be rent and you shall see me and know that I am—not with the carnal neither natural mind, but with the spiritual” (Doctrine and Covenants 67:10). Such revelations become possible by humbly stripping away jealousies and fears.⁶⁶

27:51. *Jesus’s death also triggered an earthquake.* Interestingly, the prophet Enoch witnessed this tumultuous event in a vision: “And he heard a loud voice; and the heavens were veiled; and all the creations of God mourned; and the earth groaned; and the rocks were rent; and the saints arose, and were crowned at the right hand of the Son of Man, with crowns of glory” (Moses 7:56).

It was recorded as a “great earthquake,” and the rocks split. When the Roman centurion and his unit at the cross witnessed the earthquakes and the rocks splitting, they were terrified and expressed that this must really have been the Son of God. Matthew was highly effective in conveying that Jesus’s death was more than just that of an ordinary person. In the New World, three days of darkness, earthquakes, and upheavals also occurred, as had been foreseen by several prophets. For example, Samuel the Lamanite prophesied, “The sun shall be darkened and refuse to give his light unto you. . . . Yea, at the time that He shall yield up the ghost there shall be thunderings and lightnings for the space of many hours, and the earth shall shake and tremble” (Helaman 14:20–21; see also 1 Nephi 19:12). These prophecies were thoroughly fulfilled as recorded in 3 Nephi 8:18–19.

27:52–53. *The graves were opened.* As had been prophesied, many rose from the dead and appeared in Jerusalem. This was confirmed when the resurrected Christ came to visit the Nephites (see 3 Nephi 23:9–13). Jesus wanted this point to be clearly recorded and preserved, making clear that resurrection would save all humankind from physical death. In all of this, it is clear that God needed and that Jesus wanted all of this to happen. Jesus was not a victim of some miscarriage of justice. For Matthew, the bottom line was that Jesus was in complete control of everything that happened, and as Jeffrey R. Holland has said, “the supreme sacrifice of His Son [was] as complete as it was voluntary and solitary.”⁶⁷ He voluntarily handed over His spirit: “Into thy hands I commend [hand over] my spirit,” so that “as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Corinthians 15:22).

Matthew 27:55–60. Event 41: Joseph of Arimathea Protects, Wraps, and Places the Body in His Tomb

Joseph, a rich man from Arimathea (northwest of Jerusalem), was in the Holy City as all this was happening (Luke 23:51). Luke’s mention of his wealthy status adds credence to the fulfillment of another prophecy: “And He made His grave with the wicked, and with the rich in His death” (Isaiah 53:9). Joseph of Arimathea is identified by Matthew as a disciple. Luke adds that though he was a member of “the council”—

presumably the Sanhedrin—he was a “good, just man,” who had not agreed to their plan and action (Luke 23:51). Mark records that he was an honorable councilman in the Sanhedrin who had been looking for the kingdom of God (Mark 15:42).

Joseph donated his new tomb which had recently been cut out of the rock for Jesus’s burial and asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Pilate surprisingly allowed him to take Jesus’s body. Contrary to the usual treatment of executed bodies, who often were not allowed an official burial, Joseph wrapped Jesus in a clean linen cloth and took responsibility for a proper burial. According to John, Nicodemus, the converted Pharisee and “ruler of the Jews,” came and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred-pound weight of it, and helped Joseph perform a Jewish burial (John 19:39). Joseph covered the entrance with a stone that was large enough that he had to roll it into place, and then left (Matthew 27:60; see also Mark 15:46).

Matthew 27:61. Event 42: The Two Marys Remain at the Tomb

Matthew indicated that many women who had followed Jesus from Galilee and had ministered unto Him were present at the Crucifixion, watching from a distance (Matthew 27:55). Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of Zebedee’s children (27:56). When Jesus’s body was laid in this new tomb, the two women named Mary remained there, seated before the tomb as they watched all that occurred. Matthew identified them as Mary Magdalene and the other Mary. She had been previously recognized as a woman from Galilee—not Bethany—and the mother of James and Joseph. Jesus’s mother was identified as having two boys named James and Joseph (Joseph) when Jesus spoke in Nazareth, so it would have been normal for her to have been there. They left when it became the Sabbath.

Jewish belief held that the spirit may not have fully left the body until the third day. Note that Jesus delayed raising Lazarus until the third day so that people knew that he was really dead. Accordingly, it was a Jewish custom to watch the tomb of a relative or friend until the third day following death to ensure that a premature burial had not taken place.⁶⁸

Matthew 27:62–66. Event 43: Pilate Allows the Chief Priests and Pharisees to Guard the Tomb

Matthew alone includes the following event. The chief priests and the Pharisees came together concerned that the disciples could steal the body of Jesus and claim that He had been resurrected, as He promised. So they went to Pilate to ask him to ensure that the tomb was secured and guarded. They argued that a trick or fraud regarding Jesus’s resurrection—a final deception—would be worse than what had already happened.

Pilate’s answer was a bit ambiguous. Was he dispatching a Roman watchguard to help them, or was he suggesting that the Jewish leaders could use their own guards? Either way, he wanted the tomb to be as

secure as they could make it, and they went and secured the tomb as thoroughly as they could, making sure the stone was immovable and guarded. Unwittingly, the chief priests only strengthened the evidence that Jesus's body had not been stolen.

Matthew 28:1–10. Event 44: An Angel Tells the Two Marys that Jesus Had Risen from the Dead

Meanwhile, the two Marys, who had stayed watching the tomb until the Sabbath, returned to the tomb when the Sabbath was over. There, they found the tomb open. A good question is why the tomb needed to be opened physically. Couldn't a resurrected being simply leave? Ogden and Skinner point out that the open tomb was as symbolic as the torn temple veil; the spirit prison was now open, and people were free to move forward.⁶⁹ During those hours, Jesus's spirit proclaimed the gospel to those in spirit prison.⁷⁰ As a practical matter, having the stone removed allowed Jesus's followers to look inside and see for themselves that His body was no longer there.

Matthew 28:11. Event 45: Some of the Guards Report to the Chief Priests

Matthew attributed what may have been an aftershock of the initial earthquake to an angel rolling away the large stone before the tomb. He described the angel as being "like lightning" and said that his clothes were "white as snow." He added that this angel, who had descended from heaven, sat upon the rock. Joseph Smith was inspired to point out that there were actually two angels and that both sat on the rock.

Regarding the glorified appearance of the clothing of heavenly messengers, Joseph Smith described the robes worn by the angel Moroni as follows: "He had on a loose robe of most exquisite whiteness. It was a whiteness beyond anything earthly I had ever seen; nor do I believe that any earthly thing could be made to appear so exceedingly white and brilliant" (Joseph Smith—History 1:31).

The tomb had been guarded by Jewish guards who were terrified enough to shake and "fall as dead men." No doubt they were horrified and were worrying about their fate. Maybe to prevent punishment, some of these guards went and reported these events to the chief priests, who called the elders to a meeting to discuss the matter.

Matthew 28:12–15. Event 46: The Elders Bribe the Guards to Say the Disciples Stole the Body

After some discussion, the temple officials gave a large sum of money to the guards, who were loyal to the chief priests. They were not Roman soldiers being bribed; these were their own temple soldiers. According to Matthew, these chief priests had plenty of reason to know that something extraordinary had

happened. The guards took the money and did as they were told, which was to tell people that “His disciples came and stole him away while we slept” (28:13), and Matthew reported that this lie was commonly circulated (28:15). The chief priests assured the men that if Pilate heard the story, they would talk to him and make sure the guards were not punished for sleeping on the job. Matthew portrays them to the chief priests as a powerful, controlling, self-focused group.

Matthew 28:16–20. Calling 5: Jesus Meets the Eleven in Galilee and Sends Them to All the World

While other Gospels end otherwise, Matthew concludes with just one critical event, when the risen Savior recommissioned the eleven Apostles to continue their work teaching, baptizing, and continuing to serve as His representatives after His ascension. The scope, unlike their first commissioning in Matthew 10, was extended from going not just “to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” but now to “teach all nations,” as had been prophesied in Matthew 24. He sent them forth: “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.”

Matthew does not mention how the disciples had seen the resurrected Jesus in Jerusalem. Those appearances were important validations of Jesus’s Resurrection. But beyond that, the Apostles needed to be authorized, instructed, and empowered to go forward, united, in carrying out the building of the kingdom of heaven here on earth.

The angels had instructed the women to “tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me” (Matthew 28:10). Matthew 28:16 says that Jesus had appointed the eleven disciples to go to Galilee to meet Him not just going “into *a* mountain” (King James Version; emphasis added) but literally “into *the* mountain” (Greek, *eis to oros*, as in Matthew 5:1; 8:1; 14:23; 15:29). Since Jesus did not need to tell them which mountain, they would have known where in Galilee to find Him—namely, the place where they had been with Him on several occasions before; it was some holy place that they knew. The word *appointed* here does not mean that He had made an appointment with them; the Greek word *etaksato* refers to the place where He had “put them into their positions or places,” “assigned them to a certain position” or even “ordained” them. They were to go back to the place where they received their original apostolic callings and ordinations, their endowments, and keys. They knew where that place was, and that is where they went.

According to Acts 1, Jesus stayed with His eleven Apostles, “being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.” Their roles as Apostles involved their being “witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”

28:17–18. Some hesitated. Here we are told, according to the King James Version, that when the Apostles saw the resurrected Jesus, most of them worshipped Him but “some doubted.” The Greek word

translated here as “doubted” also means “hesitated.” However, when it was translated into Latin, the word *dubitare* was used, which means only “to doubt,” conveying a narrower range of meaning. At this point, even the doubting Thomas had seen and touched the resurrected Lord in Jerusalem. Now, perhaps, a few of them were hesitant because, understandably, they did not know yet know what was coming next or what their response should be.

Jesus immediately confirmed and reassured His Apostles that “all authority is given unto me in heaven and in earth.” The King James Version has translated the Greek word *exousia* as “power,” but it more precisely means “authority.” The sequence here suggests that Jesus was helping the Apostles recognize that He now had all priesthood authority in heaven and in earth, and therefore He could extend and add to their apostolic commissions. Under normal laws and legal precedents, the authority of an agent to represent a person did not continue after the death of the principal. But, being still alive and with full authority, Jesus ensured that they knew that their callings were reconfirmed and they were to continue as follows: “Therefore go and instruct all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you” (28:19–20)

At the time of the Restoration of the Church of Jesus Christ in 1830, Jesus extended the same commission, as missionaries were called from the many stakes of Zion to “go forth into all nations” (Doctrine and Covenants 39:15). The manner of baptism into the restored Church of Jesus Christ is, as stated here in Matthew, to be conducted in the name of “the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” The Lord again revealed the exact manner (see 3 Nephi 11:25; Doctrine and Covenants 20:72–73; 68:8).

28:20. *I am with you always.* Jesus made sure that His faithful Apostles knew that they were not being cut loose and left alone. He compassionately and expansively added, “And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the world.” Referring to Himself as the great I AM (Greek *egō eimi*), Jesus’s words may not only have conveyed just a declaration but also bestowed a priesthood blessing and promise: “And indeed, *I* with you *AM* each and every day until the completion of this age [*synteleias tou aiōnos*]. Amen.”

In modern revelation, the Lord promised at least a dozen times that He would be with people until the end, whether individually, in pairs, or in groups. A personal promise to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery was: “Be patient in afflictions, for thou shalt have many; but endure them, for, lo, I am with thee, even unto the end of thy days” (Doctrine and Covenants 24:8). His final covenantal promise was stated as follows: “For I am the Lord thy God, and will be with thee even unto the end of the world, and through all eternity; for I seal upon you your exaltation, and prepare a throne for you in the kingdom of my Father, with Abraham your father.”⁷¹

President John Taylor, the third prophet of the restored Church of Jesus Christ, explained the simple and precious truths of the gospel that the Apostles of the Lord should preach: “Jesus, when upon the earth, ordained and set apart others and told them to go into all the world and preach the Gospel. What Gospel? That Gospel that brings life and immortality to light; that Gospel that brings men into communication with

their Maker; that Gospel that will show us who we are and what we are, and why we are here, and the object of our existence, and what lies before us.”⁷²

Notes

- 1 See John W. Welch and John F. Hall, *Charting the New Testament* (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2002), chart 10-1.
- 2 See Welch and Hall, *Charting the New Testament*, chart 10-4.
- 3 See Welch and Hall, *Charting the New Testament*, chart 10-5.
- 4 See Welch and Hall, *Charting the New Testament*, chart 10-6.
- 5 See Welch and Hall, *Charting the New Testament*, chart 10-3.
- 6 On this pervasive factor of fear, see Welch and Hall, *Charting the New Testament*, chart 10-2.
- 7 Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 644.
- 8 See, for example, 1 Samuel 16:12–13; 2 Samuel 2:4; Psalms 18:50; 45:7.
- 9 James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret News, 1916), 512n10.
- 10 Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2002), 1:702.
- 11 Origen, *Commentary on Matthew*, in *Die Griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte* (Berlin, Germany: Akademie-Verlag, 1897–), 38:2:187–188, and Manlio Simonetti, ed., *Matthew 14–28*, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament 1b* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 243.
- 12 Ceil Rosen and Moishe Rosen, *Christ in the Passover* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 2006), 22–23.
- 13 Hilary of Poitiers, *On Matthew*, 32.2, in *Matthew 14–28*, 261.
- 14 Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (London, UK: Latter-day Saints’ Book Depot, 1854–1886), 2:4.
- 15 See Moroni 4–5 and Doctrine and Covenants 20:77, 79.
- 16 John 4:9; 7:38; see also Revelation 21:6.
- 17 Russell M. Nelson, “Worshiping at Sacrament Meeting,” August 2004 general conference, online at church ofjesuschrist.org.
- 18 “History, 1838–1856, volume D-1 [1 August 1842–1 July 1843],” pp. 1572–1573, The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-d-1-1-august-1842-1-july-1843/217>.
- 19 John Taylor, in in *Journal of Discourses*, 20:259–260.
- 20 Bruce R. McConkie, *The Mortal Messiah*, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1979–1982), 4:124–125.

- 21 Frederic W. Farrar, *The Life of Christ* (Windham, NH: Windham Press, 2013), 626.
- 22 D. Kelly Ogden and Andrew C. Skinner, *Verse by Verse: The New Testament*, 2 vols. (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2006), 1:607.
- 23 Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and Thomas A. Wayment, eds., *From the Last Supper through the Resurrection: The Savior's Final Hours* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2003), 154.
- 24 Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 613.
- 25 Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2002), 433–435.
- 26 Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 571
- 27 Andrew C. Skinner, *Golgotha* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2004), 19.
- 28 Kent P. Jackson and Robert L. Millet, *Studies in Scriptures*, vol. 5, *The Gospels* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1986), 441.
- 29 Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 20.160–172.
- 30 John W. Welch, “Latter-day Saint Reflections on the Trial and Death of Jesus,” *Clark Memorandum*, Fall 2000, 2.
- 31 Spencer W. Kimball, “Peter, My Brother” (Brigham Young University devotional, July 13, 1971), speeches .byu.edu.
- 32 Thomas S. Monson, “The Upward Reach,” October 1993 general conference, online at churchofjesuschrist.org.
- 33 Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew*, 4.27.4, in *Matthew 14–28*, 273.
- 34 “History, 1838–1856, volume E-1 [1 July 1843–30 April 1844],” p. 1921, The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-e-1-1-july-1843-30-april-1844/293>.
- 35 Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2010), 1011–1012.
- 36 Luke 4:29; John 5:18, 7:1; 8:37.
- 37 Origen, *Commentary on Matthew* 120, in *Die Griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller*, 38.2:253–254.
- 38 *Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York, NY: Robert Appleton, 1905–1912), s.v. “Pilate, Pontius.”
- 39 Bruce R. McConkie, *Mortal Messiah*, 1:185.
- 40 Origen, *Variae Lectiones in tom. XI et XII Commentariorum Origenis in Matthaemum*.
- 41 *Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Pilate, Pontius.”
- 42 Frederic W. Farrar, *Life of Christ*, 621.
- 43 *Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Pilate, Pontius.”
- 44 Hilary of Poitiers, *On Matthew*, 33.2.
- 45 Ogden and Skinner, *Verse by Verse*, 1:635.

- 46 Skinner, *Golgotha*, 92–95.
- 47 Virgil, *Aeneid*, 2:718–720. For many more examples, see Raymond E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave*, 2 vols. (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1994), 1:834
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- 51 Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, vol. 2 of 3, *Holy Week: From the Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection* (San Francisco, 2011), 187.
- 52 Pope Benedict XVI, *Holy Week*, 186.
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- 54 David L. Turner, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2008), 655.
- 55 Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities*, 7.69.
- 56 George M. Lamsa, *Gospel Light* (Philadelphia, PA: A. J. Holman, 1939), 152.
- 57 Eugene Boring, *The Gospel of Matthew*, in *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. 8 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995), 488.
- 58 James M. Freeman, *Manners and Customs of the Bible*, 392–93.
- 59 Morris, *Gospel according to Matthew*, 714.
- 60 B. Talmud, *Sanhedrin*, 43a.
- 61 See Morris, *Gospel According to Matthew*, 714, for more on this interpretation.
- 62 Turner, *Matthew*, 362.
- 63 Cicero, *Pro Rabini*, 9–17.
- 64 For a thorough discussion of these quotations and intertextual allusions, see Shon Hopkin’s two articles, “My God, my God: Why Hast Thou Forsaken Me?: Psalm 22 and the Mission of Jesus,” *BYU Studies Quarterly*, 52 no. 4 (2013): 117–151, and “The Psalm 22:16 Controversy: New Evidence from the Dead Sea Scrolls,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 44, no. 3 (2005): 161–172, which report that a fragment of this psalm in Hebrew supports the traditional reading of the Greek LXX, “They pierced my hands and my feet.”
- 65 McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 1:830.
- 66 Ed M. Rowe, “A Word Concerning Prophecy,” *Improvement Era*, June 1930, 538.
- 67 Jeffrey R. Holland, “None Were with Him,” April 2009 general conference, online at churchofjesuschrist.org.
- 68 *Semahot* 8:1, cited in Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 409.

69 Ogden and Skinner, *Verse by Verse*, 1:676.

70 1 Peter 3:18–19; for more information on that opening, see Joseph F. Smith’s vision of the spirit world in Doctrine and Covenants 138.

71 Doctrine and Covenants 132:49; see also 30:11; 31:13; 61:10; 62:9; 75:11, 13, 14; 90:9; 105:41.

72 John Taylor, in *Journal of Discourses*, 20:225.

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