



Rogier van der Weyden, Descent from the Cross (Deposition of Christ), before 1443, oil on oak, 220 x 262 cm, Museo del Prado, Madrid. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

MATTHEW 27; MARK 15; LUKE 23; JOHN 19

THE PASSION, DEATH & BURIAL OF THE MESSIAH

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Introduction

Jesus's Passion began in the Garden of Gethsemane and continued as the Lord endured arrest, abusive trials, and crucifixion. He endured "indignity to indignity, from torture to torture."¹ This week's chapters focus on the Lord's civil trials before Pilate and His scourging, Crucifixion, death, and burial. Heavier than Jesus's physical and emotional abuse was the descending weight of the sins of all the world.

Prophetically, these chapters fulfill much of the law of Moses as the laws were types and shadows of the Savior.² Finding these types, shadows, and prophecies enriches our understanding of both the Old and New Testaments.

Table 1. Outline of Jesus's Passion, death, and burial in the four Gospels

Event	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Jesus is delivered to Roman governor Pilate	27:1–2	15:1	23:1	18:28
Judas's suicide	27:3–10			
First civic trial: Pilate questions Jesus	27:11–14	15:2–5	23:2–5	18:29–38
Second civic trial: Jesus before Herod			23:6–12	
Pilate declares Jesus innocent	27:24		23:4, 13–16	18:38; 19:4, 6
Pilate's wife defends Jesus because of a dream	27:19			
Barabbas is released	27:15–21	15:6–11	23:17–19	18:39–40
Pilate washes his hands of the situation	27:24			
Pilate has Jesus scourged	27:26	15:15		19:1
Jesus is robed and crowned with thorns	27:28–31	15:17–20		19:2–3
Pilate parades Jesus: "Behold the Man"				19:4–5, 13–14
Third civic trial: Pilate questions Jesus				19:8–12, 15
Pilate authorizes Jewish leaders' execution			23:24	19:6–7, 12
Pilate delivers Jesus to be crucified	27:26b–27	15:12–15	23:20–25	19:16
Jesus is mocked by the soldiers	27:27–31a	15:16–20a		
To Golgotha (Simon Cyrene and crossbeam)	27:31b–33	15:20b–21	23:26–32	19:17
The Crucifixion (divide garment, post sign)	27:34–37	15:22–26	23:33–34, 38	19:18–24
The two robbers crucified on either side	27:38, 44a	15:27, 32b	23:32, 39–43	19:18b
Women and John beside Jesus's cross	27:55–56	15:40–41	23:49	19:25–27
Jesus is derided on the cross	27:39–43	15:27–32a	23:35–38	
The death of Jesus	27:45–50	15:33–37	23:44–46	19:28–30
Temple veil rent and centurion's witness	27:51–54	15:38–39	23:47	
Jesus's side pierced but legs not broken				19:31–37
Jesus's body is buried	27:57–61	15:42–47	23:50–56	19:38–42
The guard at the tomb	27:62–66			

Kent Brown calls these chapters “Kingship Misunderstood.” As Jesus obeys Roman and Mosaic laws, the Gospels “[brim] with irony . . . [as] Jesus’ royalty drips from the verses in this chapter, but it goes unheeded. . . . The Savior, with his hands bound, walks steadily, willingly, toward the crucifixion and burial.”³

Hearings and Trials

Jesus’s condemnation and delivery to Pilate—Mt 27:1–2, Mk 15:1; Lk 22:66–23:1; Jn 18:28–37

Mk 15:1 (Mt 27:1–2; Lk 22:66–71; Jn 18:28–30). “*in the morning the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council.*” The Weymouth translation has “at earliest dawn,” suggesting that the Jewish trial with Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin lasted until about 6:00 a.m. As mentioned previously, the Great Sanhedrin was the Jewish ruling body made up of approximately seventy members (Num 11:16), but we do not know who or how many made up this council (Greek συνέδριον, or *synedrion*). The members were chief priests (from the temple), scribes (the educated, or lawyers), and elders (the lay branch of membership). Both major parties, the Sadducees and Pharisees, were represented, though Pharisees were the minority in the council. If this council were a collection of people from the Great Sanhedrin, then a group of twenty-three could make a binding decision.

Each Gospel includes different details from this scene. Luke includes the group asking Jesus two questions: “Art thou the Christ?” and “Art thou the Son of God?” (Lk 22:67, 70). These questions were answered in Luke’s birth narratives by the angel Gabriel (Lk 1:32, 35). This becomes one of Luke’s many connections between accounts of Jesus’s birth and death.⁴

Mt 27:2 (Mk 15:1; Lk 23:1). “*they had bound him . . . and delivered him to Pontius Pilate the governor.*” As a vassal state, Judea had a Roman prefect (or governor) who was assigned to keep the peace, act as judge, and watch over Rome’s economic interest (via taxation). Pilate’s appointment was initiated by an anti-Jewish Syrian delegate.⁵

Judas dies by suicide—Mt 27:3–10

Mt 27:3–4. “*Judas . . . brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests . . . I have betrayed the innocent blood.*” Judas learns of Jesus’s condemnation and goes to the temple to talk to the chief priests. In addition to being tied to the prices for slaves, thirty pieces of silver was one-tenth of the cost of the ointment Mary of Bethany used to anoint Jesus.⁶ Interestingly, Judas was the one who complained about the wasted money. Now, only a week later, he valued the Lord so little that he betrayed Him for only 10 percent of the value of Mary’s gift.

Mt 27:5 (NASB). “*he threw the pieces of silver into the temple sanctuary.*” Matthew’s original text describes Judas throwing the money toward a specific part of temple, the sanctuary (*naos*). This

was known as the Holy Place and Holy of Holies. The reference to the sanctuary pointed symbolically to the throne of God.

Mt 27:5 (JST). “**hanged himself on a tree. And straightway he fell down, and his bowels gushed out, and he died.**” Different traditions regarding Judas’s death must have spread, because the two accounts of his death in the Bible agree only in part. The JST adds to their commonality. Act 1:18 reads, “This man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out.”

In the Bible, we find only two other instances of men who hang themselves, and both stories foreshadow the Lord’s betrayal.⁷ Likewise, Judas’s death was foreshadowed when David was betrayed by his son Absalom and his trusted counselor Ahithophel. When David learned that Ahithophel betrayed him, he went to the Mount of Olives to weep and pray. Then Absalom revolted and gathered an army to fight against his father. During battle and while Absalom was riding through a forest, his long, thick hair got caught in an oak tree. His mule ran on, and Absalom hung there until his enemies found him, mocked him, and killed him with a javelin.

Mt 27:9 (NIV). “**Then what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled.**” This is the last of Matthew’s fourteen fulfillment passages.⁸ Jesus’s life fulfills many Old Testament prophecies and patterns, and while some see in this event a fulfillment of Jer 18:2 or 32:6–15, we find an even closer match with Zech 11:12–13: “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 prized at of them. And I took the thirty pieces of silver, and cast them to the potter in the house of the Lord.” Matthew’s citation is interesting in light of historical accessibility to scriptural texts. Rarely did one individual have access to all the scripture scrolls, especially to all the writings of the prophets. It is possible that Matthew had just remembered the prophet and was not reading the text. Additionally, Matthew had just quoted Zechariah when describing Jesus’s Triumphal Entry.⁹

Stage 1: Jesus before Pilate—Mt 27:11–14; Mk 15:2–5; Lk 23:2–5

Lk 23:2. “**to accuse him . . . forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, saying that he himself is Christ a King.**” The Jews expected their Messiah to be a king, so they used the phrase “Christ a King” (with *Christ* as the Greek word for “Messiah”). While the Jewish leaders falsely attacked Jesus on political grounds (supposedly for perverting the nation), the Gospel of Luke portrays Jesus as innocent. Repeatedly, Luke demonstrates Jesus obeying Roman and Mosaic laws. What Jesus denounced were the rabbinic traditions, or oral laws.

Mt 27:11 (Mk 15:2; Lk 23:3; Jn 18:33). “**Art thou the King of the Jews?**” All four Gospels quote this phrase exactly (a very rare occurrence). It poses a question for all disciples to answer as well. It appears that no interpreter was present in the praetorium and that Jesus spoke Greek to Pilate. Most educated people at the time spoke two or three languages, with koine Greek being the most common. (The Gospels record Jesus speaking Aramaic—probably His mother tongue—in Gethsemane, on the cross, and elsewhere.¹⁰)

Mt 27:11 (Mk 15:2; Lk 23:3; Jn 18:37). “**Thou sayest.**” In Matthew’s Gospel the JST reads, “Thou sayest **truly; for thus it is written of me.**”

Lk 23:4 (Jn 18:38). “**I find no fault.**” The ABPE renders this as “I find not even one fault in him,” and the ASV has “no crime in him.” Luke includes that Jesus did not offend the Roman authorities and that Pilate offered a verdict of innocence. (The message that Jesus and the early Christians were devoted, law-abiding citizens is repeatedly found in Luke.) This is the first disclosure from Pilate’s mouth in Luke that the Lord was not guilty.

Mt 27:12 (Mk 15:3). “**when he was accused of the chief priests and elders, he answered nothing.**” Previously, Jesus answered Pilate, but He no longer answered those whom He had already taught.

Lk 23:5. “**And they were the more fierce.**” Jesus’s silence riled the Jewish leaders all the more, and they relentlessly repeated their demands. They claimed He was a national threat, but in reality, He was a threat only to Satan’s kingdom.

Lk 23:7. “**as soon as he knew that he belonged unto Herod’s jurisdiction.**” Up to this point the two Roman rulers in Palestine, Pilate and Herod, had been competitive enemies. But when Pilate heard that Jesus was from Galilee, he happily passed Him over to Herod Antipas to give a verdict. (This Herod beheaded John the Baptist and would later kill James the Apostle and imprison Peter in Act 12:2–3.)

Stage 2: Jesus’s hearing before Herod Antipas—Lk 23:8–12

Lk 23:8. “**Herod . . . was exceeding glad: . . . he hoped to have seen some miracle.**” Herod is portrayed as a sign seeker (the word *miracle* is translated “sign” in the NIV, ESV, BLB), but Jesus was not intimidated by Herod’s position and refused to talk to him. Luke describes the scene with Jesus in complete control. Only Luke includes Jesus’s contempt for Herod and the mistreatment of another Roman official. This may have been included to parallel the birth narratives (Lk 2:1; also Mt 2:1).

Lk 23:11. “**mocked him, and arrayed him in a gorgeous robe.**” Perhaps in revenge for Jesus’s lack of cooperation or perhaps to placate the Jewish leaders, Herod mocked Jesus by having Him wear a “gorgeous” or “bright and shining” robe.

Lk 23:12. “**Pilate and Herod were made friends.**” Ironically, the two previous enemies were now unified by having had a common enemy—Jesus. In Luke, neither Roman official says anything against Jesus.

Stage 3: Second hearing before Pilate—Mt 27:15–32; Mk 15:6–21; Lk 23:13–26; Jn 18:38–19:16

Lk 23:14–15. “**I . . . have found no fault in this man . . . nor [has] Herod.**” Members of the council, or Sanhedrin, escorted Jesus back to Pilate, who stated Jesus’s innocence for the second of four times in Luke. Jesus was not guilty of what they accused him of—He had not offended Rome.

Lk 23:16. “I will therefore chastise him.” The cruel Pilate tried to placate the Jews by suggesting he chastise or scourge Jesus (Jn 19:1). In the Roman Empire, one way to identify enslaved people was by the scars on their backs from whippings.¹¹ Thus, Jesus’s scourging seems all too meaningful as a sign that He has now become the Suffering Servant or slave for our sakes.¹²

Jn 18:39 (ESV; also Mt 27:15; Mk 15:6). “**you have a custom that I should release one man.**” The custom of releasing one prisoner at Passover in an act of clemency appears to have been in effect only in the provincial jurisdiction of Judea, not the rest of the Roman Empire.

Mt 27:17 (NIV; also Mk 15:7). “**Jesus Barabbas, or Jesus who is called the Messiah?**” The Anchor Bible and other modern translations prefer an older Matthean text that includes the parallel first names of Barabbas and the Lord. The names are quite interesting because Jesus, or Yeshua, was another form of the name Joshua, or Yehoshua. Both names share a Hebrew root that means “to deliver, save.” The name Barabbas means “son of the Father” in Aramaic. In a sense, both men tried to deliver their people—one through violence and the other through God’s plan. Mark and Luke explain that Barabbas had been part of the violent uprising against Rome and had “committed murder in the insurrection” as well as sedition (Mk 15:7; Lk 23:19). The Jews wanted to let him go like the scapegoat that was filled with the sins of Israel (Lev 16:10). Ironically, Barabbas was the antithesis of the Lord in that he committed the wrongs Jesus was charged with: Jesus was tried for tyranny against the government in the Roman trial and for blasphemy in the Jewish trial because He claimed that He would sit “at the right hand of the Mighty One” (Mt 26:65 NIV).

Mk 15:9 (Mt 27:17; Jn 18:39). “**Will ye that I release . . . the King of the Jews?**” Pilate’s response can be interpreted in different ways. Was he honoring Jesus or laughing at the Jews? In light of his tense relationship and cruel history with the Jews (see notes on Mt 27:2), he was likely poking fun at them and Jesus—He called a bound prisoner their king. Pilate had already declared Jesus’s innocence, yet his actions showed that he did not care about justice and his words showed that he was politically motivated. The Jewish trial was “a mockery of a prophet, and the Roman trial a mockery of a king.”¹³

Jn 18:40 (NIV; also Mt 27:21; Mk 15:11–12; Lk 23:18). “**They shouted back, ‘No, not him! Give us Barabbas!’**” As is clearly recorded in all four Gospels, the Jewish leaders gathered outside the praetorium wanted Jesus to be killed. Pilate’s position was made more challenging when his wife intervened with the message that she had dreamt about Jesus’s innocence. Pilate would someday regret not following his wife’s advice. Centuries later, the Greek Orthodox Church made Pilate’s wife a saint for defending Jesus.¹⁴

Scourging

Soldiers scourge and mock Jesus—Mt 27:27–30; Mk 15:16–19; Jn 19:1–3

Jn 19:1. “Pilate . . . took Jesus, and scourged him.” The Gospel of John does not paint a nice picture of Pilate and is the only Gospel to include his order to scourge Jesus. (Matthew and Mark include the

scourging after the mocking without identifying Pilate as the instigator.) Crucifixion was often preceded with scourging or flogging in the Roman Empire. The weapon used in these floggings was a whip made with leather or grass thongs attached to a wooden handle. Sharp objects such as bones, rocks, and lead shot were sometimes woven into the leather, making it even more dangerous. To perform the torture, two soldiers tied their victim to a post and soundly beat him. Jesus's skin was lashed, ripped, and pierced like a crushed olive.¹⁵ Under the law of Moses, "no more than forty lashes" were allowed when whipping Jews (Deu 25:3 BSB). Those performing the torture usually stopped at thirty-nine lashes to ensure they did not break the law (2 Cor 11:24). Some victims died from the scourging and loss of blood. If the prisoner lived, they were left naked, in excruciating pain, and were then taken outside the city wall to endure the terror of crucifixion.

This episode fulfilled two of Isaiah's Suffering Servant passages: "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" (Isa 50:6); and "From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores" (Isa 1:6). While Jesus fulfilled the role of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah, He also received the trademark of an enslaved person in the Roman Empire: a scarred back.¹⁶ A few years after this event, the Sanhedrin also had the Apostles beaten (Act 5:40).

Mk 15:16 (BLB). "*the soldiers led Him away into the . . . Praetorium, and they call together the whole cohort.*" The soldiers took Jesus back into the hall or praetorium. A cohort, or "the whole band" (KJV), was a group of about 480 soldiers (the size of a cohort varied at times).

Mt 27:28–29 (Mk 15:17; Jn 19:2). "*they stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe . . . plaited a crown of thorns . . . a reed in his right hand . . . and mocked him.*" Matthew and Mark join John in their inclusion of the soldiers mocking Jesus. The dramatized mockery of a king had probably been performed before by the Romans on others who aspired to take over their leadership.

Thorns for Jesus's crown could have been easily gathered, but the crown would have been difficult to create without obtaining injury. The land of Israel was filled with thorns of all sizes and strengths. The soldiers draped a robe made of fabric used for royalty on Jesus. (The robe was scarlet in Matthew and purple in Mark, John, and the JST of Matthew.) Expensive fabric associated with extreme wealth was purple. The costly dye was extracted from sea snails and mollusks from the Syrian and Phoenician coasts. (The name Phoenicia means "land of the purple.")¹⁷

Mk 15:18–19 (Mt 27:29–30; Jn 19:3). "*Hail King of the Jews! And they smote him . . . spit . . . worshipped him.*" The Roman soldiers' mocking was probably more an expression of political humor—they were laughing at the Jews' excuse for a king—than of animosity toward Jesus. As they mocked Him, they scorned the Jewish nation by mimicking, "Ave Caesar!"¹⁸ The Roman records describe a similar scene in their triumphal marches of the first century.¹⁹ The Roman soldiers in Jerusalem were at best apathetic toward Jews and at worst rabidly anti-Jewish. Ironically, the unbelieving Gentiles mockingly called Jesus a king, but soon believing Gentiles would use the same title respectfully.

Pilate delivers Jesus to the Jews—Jn 19:4–15

Jn 19:4–5. *“I bring him forth to you . . . I find no fault. . . . Behold the man!”* Only John records this scene. Pilate’s words here do not line up with his actions, and so it appears that Pilate was sarcastically jeering at his Jewish subjects. If he had planned on protecting Jesus after declaring Him innocent for the third time, why did he parade the beaten and bleeding Jesus before the mob in all the trappings of a mock king?²⁰ We get a feel for Pilate’s animosity against the Jews as he introduced Jesus to them still “wearing the crown of thorns, and the purple robe” (Jn 19:5). If Pilate’s words were sincere, why the scourging and additional mocking?

Jn 19:6. *“Take ye him, and crucify him.”* Pilate allowed the Jews to take control of their victim, but they preferred that the Romans do their political dirty work. Pilate became one of the serfs of Satan who disfigured Jesus as prophesied in Isaiah.

Jn 19:7. *“by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God.”* The law of Moses, which was supposed to protect the name of God and prepare a people to receive their God, was used by these Jewish leaders to kill God. Lev 24:16 explains that “whoever blasphemes the name of the Lord must surely be put to death; the whole assembly must surely stone him” (BSB). But rather than having the people stone Jesus and risk falling out of favor with the majority (who honored Jesus as a prophet or Messiah), the chief priests and scribes asked the Romans to crucify Him.

Jn 19:8–9. *“Pilate . . . was the more afraid; . . . But Jesus gave him no answer.”* John recorded the dialogue between Jesus and the defensive, superstitious Pilate, who worried that Jesus was divine. The polytheistic Roman religion believed in beings that were half-mortal, half-god. Pilate’s fear of Jesus fitting into this category led him to question his decision. Jesus refused to respond to the hypocrite, again fulfilling Isaiah 53:7: “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.” Jesus’s response shows His control of the conversation and the entire situation.

Jn 19:10. *“Speakest thou not unto me? . . . I have power to crucify thee.”* As we look at life from an eternal perspective, we see that no one has any power on their own. Everything we have comes from our omniscient Father.

Jn 19:12. *“the Jews cried out, saying, If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar’s friend.”* Romans used the honorific title “Friend of Caesar” for those who performed a great service or loyalty.²¹ By now, though, Pilate had already egged on the Jewish mob and, conversely, weakly succumbed to its pressure.

Jn 19:13. *“Pilate . . . sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called the Pavement . . . Gabbatha.”* For capital sentencing, Pilate would have mounted the judgment seat. But in reality, Jesus was the only Judge in the room; everyone else was actually on trial. Kelly Ogden explained, “Gabbatha is equivalent to the Greek *lithostroton*, meaning the stone courtyard of the judgment hall . . . made of large Roman flagstones . . . in a raised platform resembling a throne where the governor sat in judgment.”²²

Jn 19:14. “*it was the preparation of the passover, and about the sixth hour.*” The preparation of the Passover refers to the day before Passover (with Passover starting at sunset, or approximately 6:00 p.m.).²³ Holy days, like Passover, were also called and treated as Sabbaths (Lev 23:11). This double Sabbath meant resting on two consecutive days. As Jewish daylight hours began at 6:00 a.m., the sixth hour would have been noon. At that hour the Levites would have been slaughtering their unblemished, male Passover lambs at the temple as the sun began its descent.²⁴ Additionally, no unleavened bread was eaten after noon.

Mt 27:24 (ESV). “*Pilate . . . took water and washed his hands before the crowd . . . I am innocent of this man’s blood.*” Matthew mentions Pilate’s regret by recording how Pilate washed his hands. This was not done after the Jewish manner of washing to become clean. Pilate had only a small understanding of Jewish beliefs, and he had even less respect for them. The Romans and the Greeks practiced this custom to absolve themselves of responsibility.

Jn 19:15. “*Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar.*” This put the Jews right where Pilate wanted them—in a place to confess they had no king but Caesar. As a master politician, Pilate manipulated the situation to his own ends. “The meaning of the trial is now clear; the presence of Jesus has provoked a judgment whereby the Chosen People have abandoned their birthright.”²⁵ Philo, a Jewish contemporary of Jesus who lived in Alexandria, complained that Pilate had “vindictiveness and furious temper” and was “naturally inflexible, a blend of self-will and relentlessness. . . . [He] feared least [the people] . . . might impeach him . . . in respect of his corruption, and his acts of insolence, and his rapine, and his habit of insulting people, and his cruelty, and his continual murders of people untried and uncondemned, and his never ending, and gratuitous, and most grievous inhumanity.”²⁶

Crucifixion

Jesus’s painful walk to Golgotha—Mt 27:32; Mk 15:21; Lk 23:26–31

Mt 27:32 (NIV; also Mk 15:21; Lk 23:26). “*a man from Cyrene, named Simon, and they forced him to carry the cross.*” Crucifixion victims usually carried their own crossbeams through the city streets to the place of crucifixion. But after His overwhelming night in Gethsemane and the scourging and mocking, Jesus was too weak to carry His own crossbeam. The Synoptic Gospels each record that the Romans compelled a man from Northern Africa who had just arrived in Jerusalem and who was an obvious foreigner to carry the cross. It appears that this Simon became a Christian or that at least his family did because Mark adds that he was “the father of Alexander and Rufus” (Mk 15:21). Since the author knew and included their names, we assume that he had enough contact after this experience to learn their names. We can also assume these names would mean something to other Christians in Mark’s audience.

Lk 23:27. “*there followed . . . women, which also bewailed and lamented him.*” To contrast Jesus’s detractors, Luke switches the focus to Jesus’s supporters, the women. This group of women

may have included those that Luke mentioned had worked with Jesus in Galilee, supported Him financially, and traveled with him: “Mary called Magdalene . . . Joanna . . . Susanna, and many others” (Lk 8:2–3).

Even while experiencing excruciating pain and exhaustion, Jesus saw their sorrow and reached out to the women. Culturally, men were discouraged from speaking to women, especially to those not in their family. Jesus’s action broke several of the oral laws. Jesus continued, even in His last hours, to reach out to empower women and give hope to those who were sorrowful.

Lk 23:28–29. “Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children. For, behold, the days are coming.” Jesus prophesied the future destruction of Jerusalem as a warning to the women. This verse hints that Jesus had taught in Jerusalem before and had disciples there as well as in Galilee (as the Gospel of John records).

Golgotha or Calvary—Mt 27:33–34; Mk 15:24–26; Lk 23:33; Jn 19:16–27

Mt 27:33 (RSV; also Mk 15:22; Lk 23:33; Jn 19:17). “they came to . . . Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull).” Crucifixions took place outside the city wall along a main road. The JST changes the word “skull” to “place of burial.” This may have been the ritual site where the ashes of the red heifer were kept “without the camp in a clean place” beyond the walls of the temple and city as “a water of separation: it is a purification for sin” (Num 19:9). Both Golgotha (Hebrew) and Calvary (Latin) mean “skull.” Perhaps this place was referred to as the place of the skull because of all the bones left there, or perhaps the pockmarked limestone rock along the road looked like a skull.

Mt 27:34 (ESV; also Mk 15:23). “they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall; but . . . he would not drink it.” Twice in Mark the Lord is offered something to drink during His last hours. This would have been before the Crucifixion. Perhaps more than for quenching thirst, this drink was to stupefy the senses. Matthew and Mark report the drink being offered to Jesus before His arms were stretched out and nailed to the crossbeam. “Gall” (Matthew) or “myrrh” (Mark) may describe a mind-altering drug that numbed pain like an analgesic.²⁷ The authors included this detail in part to show a fulfillment of prophecy: “Reproach hath broken my heart; and I am full of heaviness; and I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none. They gave me also gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink” (Ps 69:20–21).

Jesus is crucified—Mt 27:35; Mk 15:24–25; Lk 23:33; Jn 19:18

Mt 27:35. “they crucified him.” The upcoming Passover did not stop the Jewish leaders nor the Romans from carrying out the Lord’s Crucifixion. Mk 15:25 tells us the soldiers crucified Jesus at the third hour, or 9:00 a.m., but John said it happened after the sixth hour, or noon. John to be appears more historically accurate, so we assume Jesus was on the cross for less than three hours.

Romans crucified robbers, revolutionaries, and insurrectionists across the empire, and from 37 BC to AD 70, thousands of Jews were crucified in Palestine for these reasons. Romans used three kinds of

Crucifixion. Romans modified the Persian, Greek, and Syrian practices of crucifixion to create maximum torture. They hoped to delay death as long as possible so as to inflict more pain. In an attempt to put fear into their subjects and to maintain order, they crucified malefactors in public areas so that more people could see and be scared into obeying Roman rule. They always kept the instruments of crucifixion ready. Large poles (or logs from trees) were secured in the ground near major roads. These acted as a warning to all passersby. After victims carried their own crossbeams to the place of crucifixion, they were nailed or tied to the crossbeam before being lifted up by a pulley system onto the main post. Once suspended, victims suffocated as they hung. To draw out the torture, Romans placed a piece of wood on the cross the victims could sit on, allowing them to rest their arms and relieve the weight of their body pulling on the nails. But resting on the seat would only prolong their torture from hours to days of excruciating pain, burning fever, thirst, and stinging insects. Just hanging naked in public was the utmost humiliation for a Jew.

crosses: one in the shape of a T, another in an X, and the last in a lowercased t (or a dagger). Some crosses held their victims eight to ten inches off the ground, and others, about three feet off the ground.²⁸ Crucifixion was official governmental violence.

First words at the cross—Lk 23:34–38

Lk 23:34 (JST). “*Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do (Meaning the soldiers who crucified him).*” Luke emphasizes Jesus’s compassionate and empowering words that offer sensitive forgiveness to those carrying out their leaders’ orders. The JST adds that Jesus was specifically talking about the Roman soldiers. Kent Brown summarized, “In pleading with his Father to forgive his executioners . . . Jesus’ terrible situation on the cross, which seems to point to his defeat, really shows off his power to remit sin and to bring willing souls to himself.”²⁹

Soldiers cast lots for Jesus’s robe—Mt 27:35; Mk 15:24; Lk 23:34; Jn 19:23–24

Mt 27:35. “*parted his garments.*” Roman executioners were entitled to their victims’ possessions (sandals, head coverings, outer robes, and so forth). All four Gospels include this detail, perhaps because Jesus’s “coat was without seam, woven from the top” (Jn 19:23). That the tunic or robe was seamless denotes its costliness. It was probably a gift from one of the wealthy women who “ministered unto him of their substance” (Lk 8:2). Some have connected Jesus’s clothing with the sacred garments worn by the Aaronic temple priests. Moses instructed, “Weave the tunic of fine linen.”³⁰ John mentions that the robe was split into four parts, suggesting that four soldiers crucified Jesus.

Lk 23:34 (Jn 19:24). “*cast lots.*” When casting lots, each participant placed their own piece of wood, stone, or potsherd into a bowl, and then the bowl was shaken. Whatever piece jumped out first would signify its owner as the winner. Matthew records that the soldiers stayed and sat down when their job was done.

The clothing being parted and lots being cast were foreshadowed in Ps 22:18: “They divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots” (ESV).

Mt 27:37 (Mk 15:26; Lk 23:38; Jn 19:19). “*This is Jesus the King of the Jews.*” Again, only John identifies Pilate as the one who wrote the sign (except the JST, which also attributes the sign to Pilate in Matthew and Mark). John recorded that Pilate had Jesus’s name and title written in Greek, Latin, and Hebrew. Pilate’s title for Him, “King of the Jews,” upset the high priest, but Pilate would not change it. Customarily, Romans wrote the crimes of the crucified on a board and then carried it before the prisoners as they walked through the city to their crucifixion. In Jesus’s case, the Romans placed the sign on the cross. Each Gospel source notes the title slightly differently, but they all include the words “King of the Jews.”

- “THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS” (Mt 27:37)
- “THE KING OF THE JEWS” (Mk 15:26)
- “THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS” (Lk 23:38)
- “JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS” (Jn 19:19)

At His birth Jesus received the same title, “King of the Jews” (Mt 2:2).

Further mocking by the rulers and crowd—Mt 27:39–43; Mk 15:29–32; Lk 23:35–37
Lk 23:37 (Mt 27:40; Mk 15:30). “*If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself.*” The crucifixion poles had been intentionally placed close enough to the road for any passersby to chide or strike the victims, and the road was filled with many people preparing for Passover. In addition to the physical pain from lacerated veins, crushed tendons, dizziness, cramped muscles, fever, and the feeling of suffocation with every short breath, Jesus had to endure the emotional abuse of His compatriots. The railings that begin, “If thou be,” sound just like Satan’s temptations all over again.

Second and third conversations from the cross—Mt 27:44; Mk 15:32; Lk 23:39–43;
Jn 19:25

Lk 23:42–43. “*Lord, remember me. . . . To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.*” The second thief knew of Jesus’s innocence and defended Him. Jesus must have been well enough known that even prisoners had heard of Him and understood that His kingdom was still to come. This man believed that Jesus could help him eternally and asked for help in the afterlife. The promise that the man would be with Jesus in paradise likely left the man with peace. We are fortunate to have President Joseph F. Smith’s vision to enlighten us on Jesus’s mission in paradise. Even though Peter mentioned Christ’s visit

Table 2. Women mentioned at Jesus’s cross (and tomb) in the four Gospels

Mt 27:56	Mk 15:40–41	Lk 24:10	Jn 19:25
			Mary Jesus’s mother
Mary Magdalene	Mary Magdalene	Mary Magdalene	Mary Magdalene
Mary mother of James and Joses	Mary mother of James the less and Joses	Mary mother of James	Mary wife of Cleopas
Mother of Zebedee’s children	Salome		Jesus’s mother’s sister
		Joanna, wife of Chuza	
	Other women		

to the spirit world, very few Christians know that Jesus organized missionary forces there during the three days and nights that His body lay in the tomb.³¹

Witnesses at the cross—Mt 27:55–56; Mk 15:40–41; Lk 23:49; Jn 25–27

Jn 19:25. “Now there stood by the cross . . . his mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary.”

Every Gospel shares a list of women who did not forsake Jesus but remained close enough to witness His Crucifixion and death. John remembered them “standing by the cross,” but Luke’s sources reported that they “stood at a distance and saw” (RSV). In either case, they were close enough to witness and talk to the Lord even when “looking on from afar” (Mt 27:55; Mk 15:40 RSV). This becomes another connection with the birth narratives, when wicked men tried to kill Jesus and women tended to Him.

The last time the Gospel of John specifically mentions both Mary the mother of Jesus and John the Beloved together was at the wedding in Cana (Jn 2:4).

In comparing records of the women at the tomb and the women at the cross, we find considerable consistency. One of the women John mentions is Jesus’s “mother’s sister,” perhaps describing an interesting familial possibility.

Which of these women was Jesus’s aunt? I see three possibilities—either Salome, Joanna, or another woman. Joanna was “the wife of Chuza, Herod’s steward” (Lk 8:3). Such an important position of wealth does not seem consistent with what a woman from a poor family in the small town of Nazareth could achieve through an arranged marriage. This makes Joanna an unlikely choice. Salome seems more likely, especially because that relationship makes the Apostles James and John (also known as the “sons of thunder”) Jesus’s first cousins. The last option is that the Synoptic Gospels do not mention Jesus’s aunt by name and that she is one of the “other women.” However, it seems less likely that such an important person in early Christian history would not be named in any of the records.

Jn 19:26. “When Jesus therefore saw his mother . . . Woman, behold thy son!” Only John’s Gospel records Jesus lovingly giving the guardianship of His mother to His beloved disciple. We learn in Mk 6:3 and Mt 13:55–56 that Mary had at least six other living children. It appears that Joseph had died, though, since no Gospel mentions him alive during Jesus’s ministry, meaning that Mary would be left without a financial and spiritual support.

Tradition states that John the Beloved took Mary to Ephesus, where they both helped build the kingdom for decades. (Visitors to Ephesus can go into a little house where some think Mary lived.) One reason why John was given this guardianship instead of one of Mary’s own children is that the Gospel of John tells us her children did not believe in Jesus’s divine role at this time. Also, John the Beloved would have been able to take care of her throughout her life since he would undoubtedly outlive Mary (and everyone else through to the Millennium). If the two shared a family tie, that guardianship would make even more sense. Mary was the first Christian disciple, and now she received the role of mother of the beloved disciple. With giving this commission, Jesus finished the work He came to do.

Nature responded to her King—Mt 27:45; Mk 15:33; Lk 23:44–45

Lk 23:44. “there was a darkness over all the earth.” Since Passover coincides with the vernal equinox (which includes a full moon), it would have been impossible for an eclipse to occur at the time Jesus died. The three hours of darkness began at noon and ended at three in the afternoon, the hour of prayer. The darkness is understood as creation mourning its Creator’s death because “he is in the sun, and the light of the sun, and the power thereof by which it was made” (D&C 88:7). Whatever the cause, the darkness covered Jesus as well. This would have also been the time during which the paschal lambs were slaughtered at the temple altar for the hundreds of thousands of pilgrims in Jerusalem. No storm is mentioned, only darkness.

Final words on the cross—Mt 27:46–50; Mk 15:34–37; Lk 23:46; Jn 19:29–30

Mt 27:46 (Mk 15:34). “Jesus cried . . . Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? . . . My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” It was 3:00 p.m., or the ninth hour (Mk 15:34) when Jesus cried out. John’s Gospel has Jesus on the cross for less than three hours total (Jn 19:14), and Mark for six hours. Repeatedly, Matthew and Mark portray the mortal side of Jesus’s nature. Here they are the only two to include this desperate call for help, the last Aramaic phrase from Jesus’s mouth. For some tragic reason, Jesus had to experience His Father’s absence, too. Medieval Christian traditions concentrated on Jesus’s agony as described in Matthew and Mark, but this overlooked the proclamation of the cross as a sign of victory that we find in John and Luke.³²

Mt 27:47 (Mk 15:35). “them that stood there . . . he calleth for Elias.” We do not know who comprised the group of those standing by the cross; we know only of the soldiers, John the Beloved, and the group of five or more women who remained beside the cross, but there may have been others. Elias

is the Greek name for Elijah. Those near Jesus may have thought of the well-known promise in Mal 4:5 that says, “I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.”

Jn 19:28. “*Jesus knowing . . . the scripture might be fulfilled, saith.*” Jesus knew which scriptures had to be fulfilled, including Ps 69:21: “They gave me also gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.” Before the Crucifixion, Matthew and Mark mention that Jesus rejected the mild painkiller of wine mixed with gall. A few hours later, Jesus was again offered vinegar on a sponge.

Mt 27:48 (Mk 15:36; Jn 19:29). “*one of them ran and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar . . . and gave him to drink.*” This time, Jesus accepted the drink. Vinegar was thought by some to be a cheaper wine. The liquid was given to Him via a sponge or a hyssop branch (according to Jn 19:29). John may have specified the hyssop because of its symbolism of purification. Hyssop is an herb like thyme, but since its use in the first Passover in Egypt, when Israelites used it to smear the paschal lamb’s blood on their doorposts, it has been a sign of God’s protection. This symbol extends to each pilgrim’s sojourn in their own wilderness.

Jn 19:30. “*Jesus . . . received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.*” Jesus knows the prophecies of His death and does not forget to fulfill any of them before He dies. Unlike the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, John depicts the Lord as the master of each moment—He maintains control of even His last breath. As Jesus gave up the ghost, John again used the word *pneuma*, “breath, or spirit-ghost.” This ties to the beginning of John’s Gospel when John the Baptist saw the Spirit descend upon Jesus and stay with Him (Jn 1:33). Now, the Spirit has moved on.

Lk 23:46. “*And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.*” Jesus’s last sigh of relief in Luke’s Gospel can be read as a cry of triumph, not merely patient resignation. This is closer to John’s records than Matthew’s or Mark’s. Luke and John record almost nothing of Jesus’s physical suffering during the Crucifixion and include slightly different versions of Jesus’s last words.³³ They portray a more dignified and trusting Jesus than do Matthew and Mark, who record His desperate cry of disappointed abandonment. Each Gospel consistently portrays a different perspective that fits into the author’s theology and message of Jesus as our Savior. The Gospels center on how the Crucifixion inaugurated the new covenant and kingdom.

In review, here is a list of the combined Gospels’ seven recorded statements from Jesus on the cross:

1. “Forgive them; for they know not what they do (*Meaning the soldiers who crucified him*)” (JST, Luke 23:34).
2. “To day shalt thou be with me in paradise” (Lk 23:43).
3. “Woman behold thy son! . . . Behold thy mother!” (Jn 19:26–27).
4. “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? . . . My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Mt 27:46; Mk 15:34).
5. “I thirst” (Jn 19:28).

6. “It is finished” (Jn 19:30; JST, Mt 27:50 has “*Father it is finished, thy will is done*”).
7. “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit” (Lk 23:46).

Throughout the Book of Mormon, sacrifices point to the “great and last sacrifice” (Alm 34:10).

Death and Burial

Temple veil tears—Mt 27:51; Mk 15:38; Lk 23:45

Mt 27:51 (Mk 15:38; Lk 23:45). “*the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom.*” In the Mosaic tabernacle and subsequent temples, the sanctuary was bifurcated by a veil separating the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. The veil represented the dividing line between heaven and God’s throne room. In Herod’s temple two veils hung eighteen inches apart. The torn veil may have been the inner veil concealing the Holy of Holies. This also takes us back to Lk 1, with Zacharias in the Holy Place lighting the incense beside the veil. Symbolically, the rip in the veil reflects at least two ideas: Jesus opened the way to the presence of God again so that all humankind could return to His presence through repentance. Jesus’s sacrifice signaled the end of animal sacrifices and Mosaic temple rituals.

Soldiers pierce Jesus’s side—Jn 19:31–37

Jn 19:31. “*the bodies should not remain on the cross on the sabbath day.*” Only John includes the details of the soldiers piercing Jesus’s side and not breaking His legs. Did he include them for prophetic and symbolic lessons? The word *sabbath* referred to either an approaching Friday night to Saturday night or another holy day. As mentioned in Jn 19:14, the day of the Crucifixion was actually the preparation for the Passover, so it could have been any day of the week. The Jews had enough influence with the Romans to make sure that no victims were exhibited on their Sabbaths or holy days. That year was a double Sabbath—the Passover Sabbath followed by the Sabbath on the seventh day of the week (Ex 20:8–11; Lev 23:7, 11). Misunderstanding this historical detail has led many Christians to assume Jesus was crucified on Friday afternoon, but that is not what John’s Gospel says (which tends to be the most accurate chronologically).

Jn 19:32. “*Then came the soldiers, and brake the legs.*” We find examples of other Jews requesting to break the legs of those being crucified in order to shorten the length of time on the cross.³⁴ Usually the Romans left the bodies on the crosses to be eaten by birds and animals of prey. This deprived the family from the privilege of visiting a grave. However, the Jews tried to remove the bodies before nightfall in keeping with Deu 21:23: “His body shall not remain all night upon the tree.”

Strange as it sounds, breaking the legs of the crucified was a kind thing to do as it brought a quicker end to the torture since the victims would not be able to hold themselves up with their legs and draw out suffocation. However, when the soldiers came to Jesus, He had already entered His rest.

Jn 19:33, 36. “*he was dead already . . . the scripture should be fulfilled.*” That Jesus’s bones were not broken fulfilled prophecy from Ex 12:46 and Ps 34:20, testifying that Jesus’s death had been planned from the beginning. Yet some Jews at that time believed that if victims were truly innocent, God would not let them die. With this misunderstanding, they thought that because God allowed the soldiers to crucify Jesus, He could not have been innocent, nor the Messiah. Furthermore, Deu 21:23 states that anyone hung on a tree (including for crucifixion) “is accursed.”

Yet others, including the Apostle Paul, saw Jesus’s death in the symbolism of the children of Israel killing their paschal lambs: “Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us” (1 Cor 5:7; see 10:1–6). Likewise, John the Baptist referred to Jesus as the Lamb of God (Jn 1:29, 36). We can find at least seven ways that Jesus typified sacrificial lambs:

- The lamb must be the firstborn.
- The lamb must be a male.
- The lamb must be without blemish.
- No bones of the lamb were to be broken.
- The lamb was to be killed between noon and three.
- The lamb was to be eaten near the spot of the sacrifice, and none of its flesh was to be carried far away.
- None of the lamb should remain in the place of sacrifice until morning.³⁵

Jn 19:34. “*one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water.*” When sacrifices were made, the Jews were required to immediately drain out the blood and sprinkle it on the altar. This is another type of Christ as the blood witnesses of Jesus’s mortal body.

Early Christians saw the spear wound in Jesus’s side as symbolic of Adam’s side being opened for the creation of Eve. At Jesus’s death, His side was opened for all to be born into immortality; the Church became the new Eve from the side of a new Adam or Son of God.³⁶

Jn 19:37. “*They shall look on him whom they pierced.*” This detail fulfilled Zech 12:10–12: “And they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn. In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem. . . . And the land shall mourn.” This has at least dual application. John also quotes this passage later in the book of Revelation, looking forward to its fulfillment at Jesus’s Second Coming, when “every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him” (Rev 1:7).

Jesus’s burial—Mt 27:57–66; Mk 1:42–47; Lk 23:50–56; Jn 19:38–42

Mt 27:57 (Mk 15:43; Lk 23:50; Jn 19:38). “*there came a rich man of Arimathea, named Joseph.*” All four Gospels include the kindness of Joseph of Arimathea. He was not only well off but also well respected and well connected. Luke describes him as a good and just man who “waited for the kingdom

of God.” Mark adds that he was an “honorable counsellor.” To make sure the reader does not question Joseph’s loyalties, Luke adds, “The same had not consented to the counsel and deed of them.”

The Synoptic Gospels explain that Joseph was a member of the council or Sanhedrin. In order to be a member of the Sanhedrin, he must have been over fifty years old. John includes that he kept his discipleship a secret “for fear of the Jews.” This fact might have made it easier for Pilate to allow him to take Jesus’s body. The Synoptic Gospels describe Joseph’s interaction with Pilate, detailing that he “begged the body” (Lk 23:52; Mt 27:58) or “craved the body” (Mk 15:43).

Archeologists have not found Joseph’s hometown of Arimathea. But early Christian historians claimed it was Ramathaim-Zophin, the town where the prophet Samuel was born and buried.³⁷ Because of his responsibility in the Sanhedrin, Joseph may have moved closer to Jerusalem.

Jn 19:39. “came also Nicodemus . . . and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight.” Only John mentions another Sanhedrin member and secret disciple. John includes a conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus about being born again in Jn 3:1–21 and Nicodemus defending Jesus to the chief priests and Pharisees in Jn 7:50. Their courage in begging for Jesus’s body from Pilate showed Joseph’s and Nicodemus’s courage, which contrasts their previously timid discipleship. Their story demonstrates how Jesus’s death (and upcoming Resurrection) began drawing people to Him.

Even though these men had maintained distance from Jesus and His followers before, their position seemingly allowed them to be in the right place to help at this point. They came forward and did what the Galilean disciples could not have done. The two men probably worked together and divided their tasks: Joseph went to Pilate, while Nicodemus bought the burial supplies. As wealthy men of influence, they would have also had several servants or slaves to help them with the tasks.³⁸ (Half the population of Jerusalem at this time were in servitude or enslaved.³⁹)

Nicodemus brought to the tomb an enormous amount of expensive burial myrrh mixed with aloes and oil. The total mixture amounted to a hefty seventy-five pounds. (“Pound” is the translation of Greek *litra*, which was actually twelve ounces at the time of the King James translation by US standards.) Myrrh is an aromatic gum grown in Arabia, Abyssinia, and India. The ancients highly prized myrrh from the earliest times (Gen 37:25). Israelites used it in incense and as a perfume for garments (Ex 30:23; Ps 45:9). It was part of the cosmetic treatment used to purify young girls for the king’s bed (Est 2:13), and it was also used in embalming (Mk 15:23; Jn 19:39). In Rev 18:13 myrrh is listed among the items of luxury trade flowing into Babylon as it meets its doom.⁴⁰

Jn 19:40 (WEB; also Mt 27:59; Mk 15:45–46; Lk 23:53). “They took Jesus’ body, and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as the custom of the Jews is to bury.” Once Pilate was assured that Jesus was already dead, Nicodemus and Joseph reverently handled our Lord’s mortal remains for burial. The Jewish custom was to wash, anoint, and clothe the body for burial.

Jn 19:41 (NIV; also Mt 27:60; Mk 15:46; Lk 23:53). “At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and . . . a new tomb.” We learn that Golgotha was close to Joseph

of Arimathea's garden and new sepulcher. This provides another echo from the Old Testament, which stipulates that the paschal lamb must be eaten at the spot of the sacrifice (or in greater Jerusalem) and not carried away.⁴¹

This is John's second reference to a garden outside of Jerusalem. The first was the Garden of Gethsemane (18:1, 26). These references to gardens hark back to the Garden of Eden, where the promises to Adam and Eve that are now fulfilled were made. The only other record that states that Jesus was buried in a garden is found in the *Gospel of Peter*.⁴² According to Mt 27:60, the borrowed tomb was Joseph of Arimathea's own sepulcher.

The scriptures give us several details on the tomb. The Greek *Codex Bezae* adds that Joseph "put before the tomb a stone which twenty men could scarcely roll."⁴³ Kelly Ogden outlined the following qualifications for the Lord's tomb.⁴⁴ It must

- be outside the city walls
- be near a main thoroughfare
- be near the place of execution
- be near a garden, vineyard, or orchard
- have at least one tomb
- be newly cut
- have an anteroom or mourning chamber with several places for burial and be large enough to walk into
- have a large, heavy stone to seal the entrance, with a groove or trough for the stone to roll in
- have a small entrance so that one must stoop to look inside; a person looking in from the outside could see the place where the body was laid
- have a stone slab or place where linen burial clothes could lie and where a "young man" could sit
- have enough space for two angels—one at the head and one at the foot of where Jesus's body had lain⁴⁵

Lk 23:55 (NIV; also Mt 27:61; Mk 15:47). *"The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed . . . and saw . . . how his body was laid."* That the women knew where the tomb was enabled them to return to the right place in three days. I presume there was a mutual respect between the groups of male and female disciples.

Jn 19:42 (NIV). *"Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation."* John tells us a little about the timing of the Crucifixion and burial, and Luke adds, "The Sabbath drew on." This means it was approaching 6:00 p.m. In only a couple of hours, the disciples were able to get everything done before their Sabbath or holy feast day. John's Gospel describes Jesus's body being laid in the tomb on Thursday before sunset, or the beginning of their Passover Sabbath. Before sunrise on Sunday morning, His body was

gone, and He was resurrected. This fulfills Jesus's prophecy that He would fulfill the sign of Jonah—that is, that He would spend three days and three nights in the tomb (Mt 12:40; 27:40). Jesus refers to His body as “this temple” or the meeting place between heaven and earth, the house of God (Mk 14:58). Thus ends the New Testament account of the death of our Lord.

Guards at the tomb—Mt 27:62–66

Matthew crafted a careful chiasmus to describe the important detail of the guards at Jesus's tomb. His poetic parallels cover twenty verses and bridge two chapters. Matthew mentions the guards three times, once each at the beginning, center, and end, “showing that the main emphasis of the whole passage rests on them.”⁴⁶ The most important message is at the center of the chiasmus as diagrammed here:

- A The *guards* at the tomb (27:62–66)
- B The women on their way to the tomb (28:1)
- C The angel and the *guards* (28:2–4)
- B' The angel and the women at the tomb (28:5–8)
- A' The testimony of the bribed *guards* (28:11–15)

The Gospel of Matthew is the only one to include this story, and its intentional arrangement speaks of its importance to the author. Perhaps the guards' false testimony swayed many and pacified others into not believing. In Matthew's text, the facts speak for themselves.

Mt 27:62, 64. “the next day . . . Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day.” Matthew includes the Pharisees' concern about guarding Jesus's tomb. The Pharisees are so zealous that they even break their Sabbath traditions to go ask Pilate to hire Roman guards to protect Jesus's tomb from robbers. The scripture says this happened on the next day, which would have included the first Passover night just after sunset. Like those who mocked Jesus earlier, these Pharisees knew that Jesus had said He would rise the third day. This became quite ironic as the unbelievers all remembered Jesus's promise to die and rise again after three days, but the disciples were shocked by His death and flabbergasted when He rose again.

Mt 27:65. “Ye have a watch: . . . make it as sure as ye can.” Because the Pharisees asked Pilate for the guard, we assume Pilate sent the Roman Praetorian soldiers. A Roman prefect, like Pilate, usually had a Roman Praetorian Guard at his disposal. In light of the Passover setting in Jerusalem with its enormous crowds and nationalistic emotions as well as the uproar from Jesus's thousands of supporters, Pilate probably sent some of the most experienced soldiers to guard the tomb and maintain order. The Praetorian Guards were extremely disciplined and governed by strict rules. Pilate may have sent a sixteen-man unit (as was sent in Act 12:4 to guard Peter).

With great irony, Matthew includes the phrase “make [the tomb] sure” three times. This meant to seal the tomb with an individual ring or signet pressed into wax, clay, or metal. One sealed a tomb with a stone, but making the seal sure required adding guards to watch the stone:

Each member was responsible for six square feet of space. The guard members could not sit down or lean against anything while they were on duty. If a guard member fell asleep, he was beaten and burned with his own clothes. But he was not the only one executed; the entire sixteen-man guard unit was executed if only one of the members fell asleep while on duty.⁴⁷

Some suggest that four guards took four-hour shifts, but all this speculation depends on how many soldiers Pilate sent. The point that Matthew makes next is that their assignment to guard the tomb turned into a big failure. Even if they were the best Roman soldiers and the most “sure seal” Rome could muster, they crumbled in the face of God’s power.

Notes

- 1 Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, 3rd ed. (1838; repr., Mclean, VA: MacDonald, n.d.), 603.
- 2 Mosi 3:15; 13:10; Gal 3:24–25.
- 3 S. Kent Brown, *The Testimony of Luke* (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2015), 1051–1052.
- 4 Lynne Hilton Wilson, “Jesus’ Atonement Foretold through His Birth,” in *To Save the Lost: An Easter Celebration*, ed. Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and Kent P. Jackson (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2009), 103.
- 5 A Roman advisor to Tiberius Caesar named Sejanus, who was anti-Jewish, assigned Pilate to rule Palestine.
- 6 See Mk 14:5; Jn 12:5; and my notes on Mt 26:13. See also Zech 11:12; Ex 12:32.
- 7 2 Sam 15:30; 17:23; 18:9–13.
- 8 Matthew includes fourteen similar fulfillment verses followed by an Old Testament citation (Mt 1:22; 2:5, 15, 17; 23; 3:3; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 13:14, 35; 21:4; 26:56; 27:9). As mentioned earlier, the number fourteen was significant in Hebrew orthography and was the numerical equivalent of the name David.
- 9 Most small villages shared one copy of the Torah with their rabbi. Larger towns had the Psalms and sometimes Isaiah. Furthermore, we also find that Matthew mixes up two people in Mt 23:35, “Zechariah son of Barachiah” (Zech 1:1) and “Zechariah son of Jehoiada” (2 Chr 24:20–22). Perhaps he intended to quote the closer parallel in Zech 10:12–13.
- 10 Mt 5:22; 27:46; Mk 4:36; 5:41; 7:34; 11:9; Jn 20:16; 1 Cor 16:22. Jews were taught Aramaic in their Babylonian captivity and brought it back when they returned to Judea.

11 Beryl Rawson, *Marriage, Divorce, and Children in Ancient Rome* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1991), 161. In approximately AD 165, Apuleius wrote *The Golden Ass*. He described a group of slaves: “Their skins were seamed all over with the marks of old floggings, as you could see through the holes in their ragged shirts that shaded rather than covered their scarred backs; but some wore only loin-cloths. They had letters marked on their foreheads, and half-shaved heads and irons on their legs.”

12 Isa 50:6. Jesus had also taken on the servant or slave role before. At the Last Supper He declared Himself to be a servant or slave: “The one who leads should become like the one who serves. . . . I’m among you as the One who serves” (Lk 22:26–27 ISV). In John’s Gospel, He becomes the servant by washing the disciples’ feet (Jn 13:2–17).

13 Richard Neitzel Holzapfel, “The Passion of Christ,” in *Lord of the Gospels: The 1990 Sperry Symposium of the New Testament*, ed. Brent L. Top and Bruce A. Van Orden (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1990), 79.

14 Kent P. Jackson and Robert L. Millet, *Studies in Scriptures*, vol. 5, *The Gospels* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1986), 446–447.

15 Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch, *The Allegory of the Olive Tree* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1994), 8.

16 Isaiah’s Suffering Servant passages are Isa 49:1–6; 51:4–11; 52:14–53:12. See also note 11.

17 For most of Old Testament history, Phoenicia held a monopoly on purple dye (Ex 25:4; 2 Chr 2:7, 14; 3:14; Pro 31:22). The Romans and others found purple dye in crustaceans and insects.

18 Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John XIII–XXI* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1970), 875.

19 T. E. Schmidt, “Mark 15.16–32: The Crucifixion Narrative and the Roman Triumphal Procession,” *New Testament Studies* 41 (1995): 1–18. “The praetorian guard gathers early in the morning to proclaim the triumphator. They dress him in the purple triumphal garb and place a crown of laurel on his head. The soldiers shout in acclamation of his lordship . . . and performs acts of homage to him. They accompany him through the streets of the city. The sacrifice walks alongside a person who carries the implement of the victim’s death. The procession ascends to the place of the death’s head, where the sacrifice is to take place. The triumphator is offered ceremonial wine. He does not drink it but pours it out on the altar at the moment of sacrifice. Then, at the moment of being lifted up before the people at the moment of the sacrifice, the triumphator is again acclaimed as lord . . . and his vicegerents appear with him in confirmation of his glory . . . he is one with the gods.”

20 Jn 18:38; 19:4, 6.

21 R. Brown, *John XIII–XXI*, 879.

22 D. Kelly Ogden, Andrew C. Skinner, and David B. Galbraith, *Jerusalem: The Eternal City* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1996), 175–176.

23 Jews began their days at sunset because the Creation accounts in Genesis start with darkness before light.

24 Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel and Epistles of John* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1988), 93.

25 R. Brown, *Gospel and Epistles of John*, 93.

- 26 Philo, *On the Embassy of Gaius*, 299–305.
- 27 W. F. Albright and C. S. Mann, *Matthew* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1971), 348; it “stupefied.”
- 28 According to *Peloubet’s Bible Dictionary*, crucifixions were abolished by Constantine. F. N. Peloubet, *Peloubet’s Bible Dictionary* [. . .] (Philadelphia, PA: John C. Winston, 1912), s.v. “crucifixion.”
- 29 S. K. Brown, *Testimony of Luke*.
- 30 Ex 28:39 NIV; Edersheim, *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, 592. Edersheim argues that the seamless garment was the dress of the high priest and that Moses wore one.
- 31 1 Pet 3:19–20; 4:6; see also D&C 138.
- 32 R. Brown, *John XIII–XXI*, 353.
- 33 Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1985), 289. McConkie claimed that Jesus had to continue to suffer for our sins on the cross; however, I do not find that in scripture. Also see James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret News, 1916), 605, 612–613.
- 34 Erkki Koskeniemi, Kirsi Nisula, and Jorma Toppari, “Wine Mixed with Myrrh (Mark 15:23) and Crurifragium (John 19:31–32): Two Details of the Passion Narratives,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 27, no. 4 (2005): 379–391.
- 35 See Ex 12:5, 8, 10, 46; 13:2, 12; Ps 34:20; Mal 1:7–14; Mt 1:21; Jn 19:14, 41; Heb 7:26–27; 1 Pet 2:22; 3 Ne 12:48; D&C 93:21.
- 36 R. Brown, *John XIII–XXI*, 954. Greek traditions held that the gods enjoyed an equal balance of blood and water.
- 37 1 Sam 1:19; 25:1; R. Brown, *John XIII–XXI*, 938; The “Onomasticon of Eusebius” and Jerome make this claim.
- 38 Heshey Zelcer, *A Guide to the Jerusalem Talmud* (Irvine, CA: Universal Publishers, 2002), 92. “The middle class citizens often owned eight slaves, the rich from five hundred to a thousand, and an emperor as many as twenty thousand.”
- 39 Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 4:420. Tim G. Parkin, *Old Age in the Roman World: A Cultural and Social History* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2003), 183. Junius P. Rodriguez, *The Historical Encyclopedia of World Slavery*, 2 vols. (Santa Barbara, CA: ABD-CLI, 1997), 1:548. In AD 47, a census across the Roman Empire documented that one-third of the population was enslaved or worked as servants. Some large cities, including Jerusalem, recorded that fifty percent of the population were servants or enslaved.
- 40 Paul J. Achtemeier, ed., *Harper’s Bible Dictionary* (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row), 672.
- 41 Ex 12:46; R. Brown, *John XIII–XXII*, 943.
- 42 R. Brown, *John XIII–XXII*, 943.
- 43 S. K. Brown, *Testimony of Luke*, 1099.
- 44 D. Kelly Ogden, *Where Jesus Walked: The Land and Culture of New Testament Times* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1991), 147.

45 See Mt 27:39, 60; Mk 15:27, 29, 46; 16:4–5; Lk 23:53; 24:2–3, 12; Jn 19:20, 41–42; 20:5–8, 11–12, 15.

46 Paul Gaechter, *Literary Art in the Gospel of Matthew*, trans. Lore Schultheiss, ed. John W. Welch (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2013), <https://chiasmusresources.org/literary-art-gospel-matthew>.

47 James McClinton, *Quid Pro Quirk: A Layman's Guide to Resolving Alleged Bible Quirks* (Bloomington, IN: WestBow Press, 2014), 167. I found this same quote word for word in several places but never with a footnote; thus I was not able to find the original source.