

# THE DEATH OF JESUS

Matthew 27:32-66

This morning, as we study the death of Jesus from the Gospel of Matthew it is important you know there are several ancient documents that record the death of Jesus.

***Mara bar Serapion*** (ca. A.D. 73): "For what advantage did ... the Jews [gain] by the death of their wise king, because from that same time their kingdom was taken away?"

***Josephus, Antiquities 18.3.3 §64***: "Pilate, upon hearing him accused by men of the highest standing among us, had condemned him to be crucified."

***Agapius, Book of the Title (summarizing Josephus)***: "Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die."

***Tacitus, Annals 15.44 (ca. a.d. 110–20)***: "This name [i.e., Christian] originates from 'Christus' who was sentenced to death by the procurator Pontius Pilate during the reign of Tiberius."

***Babylonian Talmud, tractate Sanhedrin 43a***: "On the eve of the Passover they hanged Jesus the Nazarene."<sup>1</sup>

It is important this crucial event that stands at the center of our faith can be shown to have historical evidence in addition to the historical accounts we have in the Gospels.

We pick up the story in Matthew 27:32.

**MATTHEW 27:32**

**32 As they went out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name. They compelled this man to carry his cross.**

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<sup>1</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: 9:51–24:53*, vol. 2, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1996), 1843.

It was standard Roman procedure the condemned carried his cross to the place of execution. They were forced to carry the cross beam to which their outstretched arms were tied. How far Jesus carried His cross is not known, but it may not have been far. Just prior Jesus had been scourged with a Roman scourge: a handle to which leather straps were affixed. The straps were weighted on the ends with jagged pieces of bone or metal. This literally ripped the flesh off the victims back. Jesus' backside from neck to calves was shredded. The Romans placed no limit on the number of lashes a victim could receive.

The Roman soldiers further tormented Jesus with the crown of thorns which they repeatedly beat into His scalp. By the time the Roman soldiers finished with Jesus, His condition fulfilled Isaiah 52:14:

*ISAIAH 52:14 (ESV)*

**- his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind -**

The blood loss was catastrophic. It wasn't that Jesus *wouldn't* carry His cross, He *couldn't*.

Simon was one of thousands of Jews come to celebrate Passover. Cyrene, a city near Tripoli, Libya, contained a large Jewish population. Simon was probably coming into the city to celebrate the sacrifice of the official Passover Lamb in the Temple at 9AM when pressed into service.

*MATTHEW 27:33-34*

**33 And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), 34 they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall, but when he tasted it, he would not drink it.**

Golgotha got its name, not because of its shape, but because it was the place of execution. The Church of the Holy Sepulchre sits on the site of

Golgotha. In Jesus' day, Golgotha was just outside the city walls along a main thoroughfare. On that Passover day, thousands of Jews saw Jesus hanging on the cross, the Lamb of God sacrificed for their sins. In a small gesture of compassion, the Romans offered those being crucified wine mixed with myrrh and gall to numb the pain. But it caused lightheadedness or even loss of consciousness. Jesus refused it because He wanted full control of His senses.

**MATTHEW 27:35A**

**And when they had crucified him,**

All four Gospel writers keep the account of the crucifixion simple. Their audiences knew crucifixion. Crucifixion was invented by the Persians but perfected by the Romans. It is such a horrific means of death it is the basis of our word *excruciating*.<sup>2</sup>

The Gospel of Mark tells us it was nine o'clock in the morning, or the *third hour* when Jesus was crucified. This is very significant: at that exact hour the official Passover Lamb was sacrificed in the Temple. Jesus is our Passover Lamb.

**MATTHEW 27:35B**

**they divided his garments among them by casting lots.**

Four Roman soldiers were assigned each victim. Having stripped Jesus, the soldiers were entitled to His clothes as spoil. They divided four articles of clothing: an upper garment, an under garment (tunic), a head covering, and sandals. But Jesus' robe was of such high quality they decided to gamble for it rather than tear it into four parts. This fulfilled the messianic prophecy of Psalm 22:18:

**PSALM 22:18 (ESV)**

**...they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.**

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<sup>2</sup> See *The Medical Aspects of Crucifixion*.

Having divided the spoil, Matthew tells us...

*MATTHEW 27:36-37*

**36 Then they sat down and kept watch over him there. 37 And over his head they put the charge against him, which read, “This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.”**

The Gospel of John tells us the chief priests protested what Pilate had written because it read like a title.<sup>3</sup> Pilate refused to change the wording; it was payback against the Sanhedrin for pressuring him to condemn Jesus Whom Pilate knew was innocent.

*MATTHEW 27:38-44*

**38 Then two robbers were crucified with him, one on the right and one on the left. 39 And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads 40 and saying, “You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.” 41 So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him, saying, 42 “He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. 43 He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’ ” 44 And the robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him in the same way.**

For three hours (9AM to noon) Jesus was mocked as He hung naked and struggling for every breath. Then, at noon, His greatest agony befell Him.

*MATTHEW 27:45*

**Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour.**

From the sixth hour (12 noon) to the ninth (3PM) darkness covered the land. During these three hours Jesus suffered spiritual death; spiritual

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<sup>3</sup> John 19:19-22

separation from God the Father. His human spirit was separated from God; something He had never experienced. God separated Himself because Jesus was bearing our sin in His body.

Three writers from this period wrote of this darkness. Dionysius and Diogenes, scientists living in different cities in Egypt, both recorded this darkness. Phlegon, a Greek living in Asia Minor, wrote there was a great and remarkable eclipse of the sun. He stated that the day was turned into night at the sixth hour, so that the stars were seen in heaven and that a great earthquake shook the Roman province of Bithynia, now northwest Turkey. As we will read, after Jesus gave up His spirit, there was a great earthquake.

*MATTHEW 27:46*

**And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” that is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”**

Notice this cry came from Jesus at the end of the three hours of darkness. Jesus was quoting Psalm 22:1. Psalm 22 is one of the most detailed prophecies concerning Messiah’s death and deliverance. Some believe that in quoting the opening verse Jesus intended the hearers to reflect on the entire Psalm to realize it was being fulfilled in His crucifixion and eventual resurrection.

*MATTHEW 27:47-49*

**47 And some of the bystanders, hearing it, said, “This man is calling Elijah.” 48 And one of them at once ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine, and put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink. 49 But the others said, “Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him.”**

In Hebrew, “Eli” means “My God”, but it is also a shortened form of the name Elijah. These bystanders may have thought Jesus was delirious calling on Elijah to rescue Him.

*MATTHEW 27:50*

**And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit.**

Matthew next records the supernatural signs that accompanied Jesus' death and His burial in Joseph of Arimathea's tomb.

Before we conclude I want to take us to Luke 23:39-42 to ponder an incredible miracle that took place in the midst of Jesus' crucifixion.

*LUKE 23:39-42 (ESV)*

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

Initially, both criminals mocked but one had a change of heart. Amazingly he realized four truths hanging their on his cross. First, he admitted he was a sinner getting what he deserved. Second, he recognized Jesus was innocent. Third, even though Jesus was dying, he believed Jesus could still save him. It's clear he came to believe Jesus is the Messiah and that Jesus would be resurrected and would return to setup His Messianic Kingdom. He was asking Jesus to include him in the Messianic Kingdom.

*LUKE 23:43 (ESV)*

**And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise."**

All Jesus suffered, He suffered for this: that a man like this criminal who lived a life of sin away from God can, through faith in Jesus' death and resurrection be reconciled to God.

Do you want a relationship with God?

Accept that all He suffered He suffered for you to take the punishment of your sin upon Himself so that you can be completely forgiven and reconciled to God.

That's how much God loves you and wants a relationship with you.