

# Survey of Biblical History – Part 1: Creation to Christ

## #21 - THE PASSION WEEK, PART 3: CRUCIFIXION & BURIAL

### Friday – The Crucifixion of Christ (Matt. 26:1-5, 14-16; Luke 22:3-6)

The Jewish trials of Jesus took place before dawn and right after dawn at about 6:00 AM. The official Jewish trial shortly after dawn was probably of very short duration. For the next 2-1/2 hours or so the Roman trials ensued. Just before 9:00 AM Pilate pronounced sentence upon Jesus.

#### 1. **Flagellation and Journey to Golgotha** (Matt. 27:26-34; Luke 23:26-33)

Crucifixion was preceded by the *verberatio* type flogging. In this case, the victim was tied to a post and was whipped with a flagellum that consisted of leather straps with shards of bone, glass, and/ or metal balls attached to the ends. The victim was whipped on the back side exposing muscle tissue, bones, veins and even vital organs. Many weaker victims would die of such flagellation. Most would undergo hypovolemic shock due to blood loss causing a rapid heart rate to replace lost blood. Blood pressure drops and kidneys begin to fail producing tremendous thirst. The Jerusalem soldiers repeated the mockery the Herodian soldiers had begun. But this time, they included a crown of thorns. Jesus' physical condition prevented him from carrying the 30 to 40-pound crossbeam (which his outstretched arms would later be nailed to with large spikes going through his wrists piercing the median nerve and causing searing pain) to the site of His crucifixion outside the city walls. Thus, Simon of Cyrene (cf. Mark 15:21; Rom. 16:13) was employed to help Jesus as He staggered to Golgotha.

#### 2. **First 3 Hours of Crucifixion** (Matt. 27:35-44; Luke 23:33-43; John 19:18-27)

Crucifixion was invented by the Persians, employed by Alexander the Great, and perfected by the Romans. It was reserved primarily for slaves and rebels. Death is excruciating[!] (Latin, *excruciare* – *ex* = “thoroughly/ completely” + *cruciare* = “torment/ to crucify” derived from *crux/ crucis* = “cross”). It was slow, the result of shock, severe cramping and nerve pain, exposure, blood loss (in addition to the loss of blood from the scourging which often killed a man prematurely), exhaustion, and eventually asphyxiation due to the inability to push up the legs to draw breathe into the lungs. Often the legs are broken to hasten death. The Emperor Constantine outlawed crucifixion in 337 AD. Jesus' crucifixion began around 9:00 AM and continued for 6 hours until He died around 3:00 PM. According to the Mishnah (oral traditions of the Jews collected around 200 AD), 3:00 PM was the moment when the first sacrificial lambs were slaughtered at the nearby Temple for the celebration of Passover (Josephus, the first century Jewish historian, says the Passover lambs were sacrificed between 3:00 and 5:00 PM). The pervasive bleating of sheep was probably a common sound just before the death of Jesus as worshippers brought their lambs to the temple. An inscription was placed above his head saying, “This is Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews.” Many people looked on in fascination as Jewish leaders and Roman soldiers mocked Jesus. The soldiers gambled for his belongings. Two criminals were crucified on either side of Jesus (possibly co-conspirators with Barrabas; cf. Isa. 53:12). They both joined in the mockery, but then one of them became convinced that Jesus was innocent and no ordinary man. He placed his faith in the dying Messiah.

#### 3. **Second 3 Hours of Crucifixion & Death** (Matt. 27:45-56; Luke 23:44-49; John 19:28-37)

At noon strange things began to happen. For the next 3 hours darkness fell over the area. As the hour of His death approached, Jesus cried out, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Matt. 27:46; cf. Psa. 22:1. This cry of dereliction indicates the full weight of sin had fallen upon Jesus and as a result the Father was unable to look upon the horrid mass of evil that Jesus—in

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his humanity—had taken upon Himself. Like the scapegoat on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16), Jesus was abandoned by the Father to die a lonely death in separation from Him. He felt the full weight of God’s wrath crush Him for the sins of those atoned for (Isaiah 52:13-53:12; cf. also Hab. 1:13; Gal. 3:13). The unimaginable anguish of Jesus reached its full height. This does not mean there was some breach in Trinitarian relations (i.e., between the divine nature of the Son and the Father), rather it was Jesus in his human nature that experienced the separation from and wrath of the Father.

Jesus called out that he was thirsty. A sponge was dipped into sour wine. Note the irony: After His cry of dereliction (God-forsakenness), some thought he was calling for Elijah who was to be a forerunner of the coming Messiah. They were hoping Elijah would come and save him (Matt. 27:48-49; Mark 15:36) so that a last-minute deliverance of Israel would take place from their Roman oppressors. They did not realize that His impending death would bring about a different kind of deliverance—from sin and death. As he tasted the wine He said, “It is finished!” (John 19:30), then Jesus cried out one last time saying, “Father into Your hands I commit My spirit” (Luke 23:46; cf. Psa. 31:5). This indicates that Jesus was in control of His death. It was entirely voluntary; His human will being fully aligned with the divine will (see Matt. 26:39), embracing what God had purposed for Him (John 12:27). The writer of Hebrews calls for believers to fix their eyes upon Jesus who is: *“The author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God”* (Heb. 12:2). As Jesus gave up His spirit, the veil that separated the Most Holy Place (Holy of Holies) from the Holy Place in the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom (Luke 23:45). This signified the hand of God acting as He opened the way to access the presence of the Father thru Christ’s atoning death for those who trust in Christ for pardon of sins (see Heb. 10:19-22). There was no need to break Jesus’ legs because He was already dead. To be certain, his side was pierced with a sword in which a bloody serum flowed out indicating a ruptured pericardial membrane releasing fluid surrounding the heart.

## **Friday/ Saturday - The Burial of Christ** (Matt. 27:57-66; Luke 23:50-56; John 19:38-42)

As the evening began to approach there was a concern for leaving Jesus’ body on the cross. At sundown the Sabbath would begin making it unlawful for Jesus to be buried. A wealthy man by the name of Joseph of Arimathea took charge of the situation. He was a member of the ruling council of the Sanhedrin that condemned Jesus to death. He may not have been present when they condemned Jesus. In either case, he did not concede to their verdict, being a secret follower of Jesus. He secured permission from Pilate to remove the body and prepare Him for burial. Joseph likely purchased a newly hewn tomb not far from the site of the crucifixion. Nicodemus (cf. John 3), another member of the Sanhedrin, helped Joseph along with several female followers of Jesus. As was the Jewish custom, they wrapped Jesus in a linen cloth and brought about 100 pounds of spices and perfumes to mask the stench of the body as it decayed (not to preserve the body as in Egyptian customs). All this was done very hastily before the Sabbath began. They may have had no more than an hour or so to do this.

The following day (the Sabbath) everyone rested, no doubt grieving and in utter perplexity about the unfolding events. Meanwhile, the Jewish leadership was concerned to make the grave secure, fearing that the disciples of Jesus would try to steal the body and claim He had risen from the dead. The “guard” may have been Roman soldiers which would make the tomb more secure. If they were the temple police, it would explain why they reported to the Jewish leaders and not Pilate as well as the bribes they later received from them. A cord and official wax seal was attached to the tomb as a further security measure. When the women came in the morning after the sabbath, they intended to finish anointing his body with the spices when they discovered the tomb was empty.