

Matthew

Bible Study

The Crucifixion

Matthew 27:32—54

Just before the crucifixion (Matthew 27:32—33; Mark 15:21—23; Luke 23:26—32; John 19:16—17) Jesus was already weakened by the multiple whippings and beatings, so weak that He was unable to carry His cross. They pressed an onlooker, Simon of Cyrene into service to bring the cross to Golgotha. Golgotha means skull and refers to a place of death outside the walls of Jerusalem. The actual location is not known, although many pinpoint the location to be where the rocky hill seems to form a skull just outside the north wall of Jerusalem by the Garden Tomb. This is pure conjecture and is based only on a rock formation that was discovered in the 1800's by Charles Gordon. There is absolutely no earlier record that the Place of the Skull was so named for this particular arrangement of rocks. In all likelihood the location was named the Place of the Skull because that was where executions were performed, not because of a rock formation.

Before crucifying Jesus they offered Him wine mixed with gall, a bitter, perhaps poisonous substance that when He tasted it, refused to drink it (fulfillment of Scripture—Psalm 69:21). It's possible that this mixture would help deaden the pain but being bitter He would have known that it was poisonous and He wasn't to die in that manner. It's interesting that He did drink the vinegar offered to Him while He was hanging on the cross (Matthew 27:48). Giving Him the vinegar and the wine with gall was done merely to mock Him (Luke 23:36). All this was in fulfillment of Scripture (Psalm 69:21).

As Jesus was being led to Golgotha there was a large crowd of people following Him including women who were mourning and lamenting Him (Luke 23:27—28). He turns, addresses them as the daughters of Jerusalem and laments that they should not weep over Him but weep for themselves and their children. There will come a time when they will call barren women blessed and people will call out to the mountains to fall on them and cover them up. Jesus said this with the Tribulation in mind. According to Matthew 24:15—21 (also Luke 21:20—24) when the Abomination of Desolation occurs then those in Jerusalem will need to flee to the mountains to survive. It will be a time of great woe for everyone but especially for those who are pregnant or nursing.

Isaiah 2:19 is a prophecy that men will attempt to hide themselves in caves to avoid the wrath of the Lord during the Tribulation. This happens with the breaking of the sixth seal as recorded in Revelation 6:12—17. There will be a multitude of cosmic and terrestrial events that will cause all men to quake in fear at the coming of Christ at the Second Coming.

On the cross (9 a.m. to noon)

(Matthew 27:35—44; Mark 15:24—32; Luke 23:33—43; John 19:18—27)

Having endured a number of sham trials, multiple beatings and whippings and being mocked by Jews and Romans, Jesus was found guilty of blasphemy and Pilate declared that He was to be crucified. Pilate did try to get Jesus to be released but the people desired for an insurrectionist and murderer to be released instead. Pilate identified Jesus as the King of the Jews with a placard nailed to the cross. It was perhaps as Jesus was being nailed to the cross that He asked the Father to forgive Israel (fulfilled Scripture—Isaiah 53:12) of her great sin of rejecting Him as Messiah (Luke 23:32). If the rulers had truly understood whom they were putting to death they would not have crucified Jesus (1 Corinthians 2:8).

After nailing Jesus to the cross (fulfillment of Scripture—Psalm 22:16) the soldiers took His clothes and were going to divide His tunic but because it was seamless they cast lots for it and kept it whole (fulfillment of Scripture—Psalm 22:18).

As Jesus hung between the two robbers (fulfillment of Scripture—Isaiah 53:12), the multitudes were mocking Him saying He saved others but He can't save Himself (fulfillment of Scripture—Psalm 22:17) and since He trusted in God, let God deliver Him now (fulfillment of Scripture—Psalm 22:8). The soldiers and religious leaders of Israel were also freely mocking Jesus. Even the criminals who were hanging on either side of Jesus joined in the mockery. The religious leaders said they would believe if He were to come down from the cross

(Mark 15:32). Even this statement was not true for Jesus did come down from the cross and He did walk among them for a time before ascending into heaven. Jesus had shown them everything they needed for them to know He was their Messiah. They had already rejected Him and continued to reject Him even after the resurrection.

On the cross (noon to 3 p.m.)

(Matthew 27:45—54; Mark 15:33—39; Luke 23:44—49; John 19:28—30)

At noon (the sixth hour) there was a great darkness that fell upon the whole area. This darkness lasted until Jesus died three hours later. This was a supernatural darkness that happened in a similar fashion as the ninth plague against Egypt. It could not have been an eclipse of the sun because the darkness lasted much too long. I'm sure it was not just thick clouds that obscured the sun because the Greek says the sun failed and also it seems to be connected to the Father turning His back on His own Son. It was literally and spiritually Jesus' darkest moment. There was a spiritual battle in play that Jesus needed to endure as He took on the sins of the world. I believe this was Jesus' most trying time eclipsing even the brutal physical punishment He was continuing to suffer. Being mocked by His creation and rejected by His Father left Jesus completely alone as He hung between heaven and earth. Being physically beaten, emotionally distressed and now spiritually assaulted brought Jesus to a point no man has ever experienced nor could have endured. I believe if Jesus wanted to call it quits and get off the cross He could have called for legions of angels to appear (Matthew 26:53), wipe out those who took part in His death and ushered Him into heaven. Obviously that would leave the world without a Savior and condemn all mankind to an eternal death.

It's during this period of darkness that the robber on one side of Jesus believes and desires to be with Him in His Kingdom. He went from darkness to light by simply believing in the Person of Jesus Christ. It's from these events that we know there is life immediately after death. In this case the robber was promised he would see Jesus that very day in Paradise, the place of the believing dead and part of Hades (Luke 16:19—31).

Just before dying, Jesus cries out: "My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?" This was in fulfillment of Psalm 22:1. Not able to hear clearly what Jesus was saying, those standing around Jesus thought He was calling out for Elijah and were waiting to see if Elijah would actually come and take Jesus. Some took a sponge filled with vinegar and lifted it up to His mouth to drink (fulfilled Scripture—Psalm 69:21). With that, Jesus uttered His final words, "Into Your hands I commit My spirit" and "It is finished." As He breathed His last breath, the thick curtain that divided the holy place from the holy of holies in the temple was torn from the top to the bottom and there was an earthquake that split open the rocks. The centurion closest to Jesus having seen these things remarked that this surely had to be the Son of God.

What happened to Jesus after He died?

According to Jesus, He would be in the grave for three days and three nights (Matthew 12:40). While His physical body was in the tomb, Scripture shows us He was still active. 1 Peter 3:18—20 seems to show Christ being alive in the spirit (or by the Spirit) and making proclamation to the spirits now in prison. From this verse we may surmise that Jesus went to Hades, the place of the righteous and unrighteous dead, proclaiming His victory over death. Some view this verse to be saying He preached the Gospel to those in Hades to be saved when in actuality His very presence was the sermon He preached showing them His great plan of salvation coming to fruition.

According to Ephesians 4:8—10 it seems plausible that when Jesus took captivity captive He took those who were residing in Paradise (in Hades) and brought Paradise into heaven. The believing robber was one who was ushered into Paradise after his death and was able to see Jesus once again. Paradise could finally be brought up into the third heaven after their sins were properly paid for through Christ's death (2 Corinthians 12:4).

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