

## 12. The Burial and Resurrection of Christ

### Jesus' Final Days on Earth

#### What Happened at the Death of Jesus?

We are carrying on from the previous study of the suffering and death of Christ and what took place at the cross. In this final study in the series, we will observe the miraculous events immediately after the crucifixion and consider what these events signify. We will also see how specifically and accurately Old Testament prophecy was fulfilled. God the Father took great care so that every detail involving the death of His beloved Son would come to pass "as it was written."

At midday, darkness descended over all the land (Matthew 27:45). This darkness was not complete, such as the darkness in Egypt before God brought out the Israelites (Exodus 10:21). Those witnessing the death of Christ could still see the drama as it unfolded. Some of the early church fathers wrote about this darkness, stating that it was over the land of Israel and the whole world. The early Church father and author, Tertullian, mentioned this event in his *Apologeticum*—a defense of Christianity written to unbelievers in the Roman Empire at the time: "At the moment of Christ's death, the light departed from the sun, and the land was darkened at noonday, which wonder is related in your own annals and is preserved in your archives to this day."<sup>1</sup>

I'm sure some watched the crucifixion with hopeful hearts that death would not occur. They thought that Elijah would come (Matthew 27:46) and that Jesus would, in some miraculous way, come down from the cross and confound His critics and enemies. They did not yet understand the necessity of Christ's death. New life could only come to the people of God through the substitutionary death of Jesus. God's love and justice demanded that sin be paid for; thus, Jesus had to die as the sin-bearer instead of us. Let's look at what the apostle John witnessed:

<sup>31</sup>Now it was the day of Preparation, and the next day was to be a special Sabbath. Because the Jewish leaders did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down. <sup>32</sup>The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with Jesus, and then those of the other. <sup>33</sup>But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. <sup>34</sup>Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. <sup>35</sup>The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe. <sup>36</sup>These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: "Not one of his bones will be broken," <sup>37</sup>and, as another scripture says, "They will look on the one they have pierced" (John 19:31-37).

After Christ's death at 3 pm, the special Sabbath of Passover drew near (a Jewish new day started at sundown), so the Roman soldiers broke the legs of the two crucified thieves with a heavy mallet. Breaking the legs brought death quickly, for the two thieves could no longer push up on a piece of wood under their feet to breathe. Death came soon due to asphyxiation (depriving of air). When the soldiers came to Jesus, He was already dead, so they did not need to break His legs. Hundreds

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<sup>1</sup> As quoted by John MacArthur, *The Murder of Jesus*. Nelson Publishers, p. 228.

of years beforehand, the Old Testament prophetic Scriptures spoke about these events: “A righteous man may have many troubles, but the Lord delivers him from them all; he protects all his bones, not one of them will be broken” (Psalm 34:19-20). The Scriptures also commanded that, as the Jewish people ate or internalized the Passover lamb, the bones were not to be broken, “Do not break any of the bones” (Exodus 12:46). Through hundreds of years, the Jewish people ate the lamb on Passover night, never thinking that there would be an embodiment of this symbolic Lamb, a Person who would come to fulfill the prophecies to the letter. Jerusalem at Passover swelled to at least two million people, with a minimum of ten people to a home being required to eat the Passover. God commanded that the Lamb was to be consumed completely (Exodus 12:10). Jesus, the Lamb of God, must be received internally, “Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God (John 1:12).

In God’s foreknowledge, He knew that some would say that Jesus never really died but that He fainted on the cross. To prove the doubters wrong, the Father allowed a Roman soldier to pierce Jesus’ side with his spear. John testified that out of His side came blood and water (John 19:34), i.e., medical evidence that proves in a court of law that death had occurred.

There were two primary causes of death by crucifixion: hypovolemic shock and exhaustion asphyxia. Hypovolemic shock is a term doctors give to low blood volume. The brutal beating and scourging of Christ caused Him to lose so much blood that He was too weak to carry His cross. With hypovolemic shock, a victim collapses due to low blood pressure. The kidneys also shut down to preserve body fluids causing great thirst, and water would collect around the pericardium, the sac surrounding the heart. Before death, the rapid heartbeat due to low blood volume causes fluid to gather in the pouch around the heart and lungs. John’s testimony that the water and blood, which came out of the spear wound in Christ’s side, indicates death had occurred, with the evidence being the separation of clot from serum. Just as the Lord created a wife from the side of the first man, Adam (Genesis 2:22), so too, the Bride of Christ came symbolically from the side of the Last Adam, the Lord Jesus.

### Supernatural Events at the Death of Jesus

<sup>50</sup>And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. <sup>51</sup>At that moment **the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom**. The earth shook, the rocks split <sup>52</sup>and the tombs broke open. **The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life.** <sup>53</sup>They came out of the tombs after Jesus’ resurrection and went into the holy city and appeared to many people. <sup>54</sup>When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, **they were terrified**, and exclaimed, “Surely he was the Son of God!” (Matthew 27:50-54).

What made this crucifixion different for the soldiers to the extent that “they were terrified?” (Matthew 27:54). Discuss what they witnessed and experienced as they looked on.

Darkness at midday lasting for three hours was a foreboding of something terrible happening or about to occur. We all understand what an earthquake is, but Matthew explicitly mentions rocks splitting (v. 51). How unsettling this must have been for those who witnessed the death of Christ. Why do you think Matthew brings up the rocks splitting? Jerusalem is built on very rocky terrain

with little soil for burying people. Most tombs are hewn from the surrounding rock face or built up from the ground and sealed with a slab, rock, or boulder. Could it be that these are the split rocks to which Matthew is referring? Those there witnessed sealed tombs being rent apart and godly men and women arising and walking around! We do not know who these people were, only that they were holy men and women who had died and were buried. Paul the apostle wrote, **“But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep”** (1 Corinthians 15:20). Jesus was the first fruit among those who had “fallen asleep.” We must wait to get to heaven to ask all our questions about this event!

### **What Happened in the Temple When Christ Died?**

Matthew wrote that when Jesus gave up His spirit, an incident happened inside the temple. Let’s first get a picture of the inside of the temple, and then we’ll look at the significance of what happened to this curtain.

The temple building consisted of two rooms separated by a massive curtain. The first room was called the Holy Place, and the second inner room behind the curtain was named the Most Holy Place or Holy of Holies. In the first room, the Holy Place, the priests were allowed to work by replenishing the bread on the Table of Showbread, incense on the Table of Incense, and olive oil in the seven-branched candelabra. Separating the priests from the presence of God was the massive thirty-foot-wide, thirty-foot-high, heavy curtain as thick as a man's hand. Beyond that curtain was the Holy of Holies, the place of God's presence. In Solomon’s temple, the inner room of the Holy of Holies had a box called the Ark of the Covenant. It was made of acacia wood and covered inside and out with pure gold. The Ark of the Covenant kept the tablets of the Ten Commandments and had a gold cover or lid called the Mercy Seat. At either side of the Ark and looking down onto the Mercy Seat were two golden angels with their wings touching each side of the room (1 Kings 6:23-28).

On the Mercy Seat, God's visible presence, the *Shekinah* glory, was manifest as a cloud. **“There, above the cover between the two cherubim that are over the ark of the covenant law, I will meet with you”** (Exodus 25:22). One day a year, on the Day of Atonement, the High Priest, the only man who could enter the Most Holy Place, went beyond the curtain. With a rope tied around his left ankle and a little bell on the hem of his garment, he would enter the Holy of Holies with a pan of glowing coals from the altar of incense, filling the air with a smoky cloud and aroma of incense. Using his fingers, he would sprinkle the blood of a sacrificial substitute on the mercy seat and the floor before the Ark of the Covenant. There were symbolic preparations for the high priest before going into the Holy of Holies; if the priest did not prepare himself properly, he could die. The ringing of the bell would let the priests know if the high priest was still alive, and the rope was for him to be pulled out if the sacrificial blood was not accepted and he had died.

If the high priest came out, the sacrificial atoning blood was accepted. God said that He would meet with the man at the Mercy Seat. The acceptance of the blood sprinkled upon the Mercy Seat demonstrated to the people that their sins were covered. The people of God would wait in the temple courtyard for the high priest to come out and give the one word, “Forgiven.” When the people heard the word, there was relief and rejoicing, and their sins were forgiven. This would happen every year on the Day of Atonement.

This yearly reminder of the shedding of blood to forgive sin was an essential part of the Israelites' worship. What was God trying to teach them and show them through this ritual?

Matthew records that, at the death of Christ, something shocking occurred in the temple. The temple veil was torn from top to bottom to indicate that God tore the curtain and not man. The Father showed that, from the time of Christ's sacrificial offering, a new way of approaching God was inaugurated (formally introduced). No longer would only one man be able to enter into God's presence, but all men and women through the finished work of Jesus at the cross. No wonder the Book of Acts records that "a large number of priests became obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7). When the priests heard that Jesus died at the exact time as the curtain tore, many were shocked at the significance of what happened and a large number of priests came to faith in Messiah. God was fulfilling the prophecy of a new covenant spoken by the prophet (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

### The Burial of Jesus

As the sun began to get low, the Lord moved a rich man to give Jesus an honorable burial. Let's read further:

<sup>38</sup>Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jewish leaders. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away. <sup>39</sup>He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. <sup>40</sup>Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. <sup>41</sup>At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid. <sup>42</sup>Because **it was the Jewish day of Preparation** and since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there (John 19:38-42).

The Jewish rulers wanted to keep the commandment in Deuteronomy 21:23, i.e., that a body should not be left hanging during the night, so they went to Pilate and demanded that they should hasten the death of the three before the evening came and Passover started (John 19:31). The leaders were keen to keep the minor laws of the Scriptures, while they had just committed the greatest crime in all of humanity: the rejection and murder of the Son of God. There can be no greater sin than the rejection of the Messiah.

Two secret believers, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, members of the Sanhedrin, broke cover and sought to honor Jesus in His death. The two of them appealed to Pilate for the body and, according to Jewish burial customs, bought a costly amount of myrrh and aloes and began to wrap the body with seventy-five pounds of burial spices.

Myrrh was a fragrant sticky gum resin used by the Egyptians in embalming. The Jews used it in powder form but mixed it with aloes and aromatic sandalwood. The two combined would harden and form a cocoon around the body.

Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea saw the need for the body to be honorably buried rather than in the place assigned for Christ by the leaders at the city dump before the Sabbath, which started just three hours from the time Jesus died. John is the only one of the disciples that tell us about Nicodemus' assisting Joseph of Arimathea with the burial of Jesus. They were both secret believers up to this point and perhaps felt moved to make up in death for their neglect of Jesus or their lack of courage to support Him publicly when He was alive.

The amount of spices used would have been considered extravagant, enough for a king's burial, which is also symbolic when we think that Jesus is the King of Kings. Nicodemus brought 100 *litrai* or roughly 75 pounds of perfumed ointment made from myrrh and aloe. It would have been exceedingly expensive. Overall, we know that God, the Father, oversaw every detail surrounding the death and burial of His Son. Even Jesus' burial fulfilled prophecy, for the leaders planned or assigned him a common grave along with the thieves, but God had a rich man's tomb planned for him:

He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth (Isaiah 53:9).

The two men were accompanied by several women who made the journey down from Galilee with Jesus and the disciples (Luke 23:55). They saw where the tomb was so that they could return with more spices and perfumes when the Sabbath was over. Merrill Tenney, in his book, *The Reality of the Resurrection*, tells us about the customary procedure for the burial:

The body was usually washed and straightened and then bandaged tightly from the armpits to the ankles in strips of linen about a foot wide. Aromatic spices, often of a gummy consistency, were placed between the wrappings or folds. They served partially as cement to glue the cloth wrappings into a solid covering. When the body was thus encased, a square piece of cloth was wrapped around the head and tied under the chin to keep the lower jaw from sagging.<sup>2</sup>

Matthew wrote that Jesus was placed into a new tomb cut out of the rock. Joseph of Arimathea was the one who owned this tomb close to Golgotha, and Matthew records him as being wealthy (Matthew 27:57). Rich men's tombs, such as this one, were made big enough in which to stand. Matthew also adds that a big stone was rolled in front of the entrance to the tomb. The Jewish high priests and elders then pleaded with Pilate for a guard of four Roman soldiers to be placed around the tomb to watch over it. They feared that some of Christ's disciples would steal the body and claim Christ rose from the dead. To prevent deception, the stone door had a seal on it (Matthew 27:60-66). Stones weighing more than a ton were chiseled into a coin shape with a slot cut for the stone door to roll across the entrance.

Why did the Jewish leaders go to Pilate for Roman guards to be placed around the tomb? Why didn't they guard it with their own men? It may have been because they knew it would be hard to get Jewish people to guard the body because they were all preparing to eat the Passover meal with their families; besides, the authority of the Roman soldiers would carry more weight as well, for

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<sup>2</sup> Merrill C. Tenney. *The Reality of the Resurrection*. New York, NY. Harper and Row Publishers, 1963, p. 117.

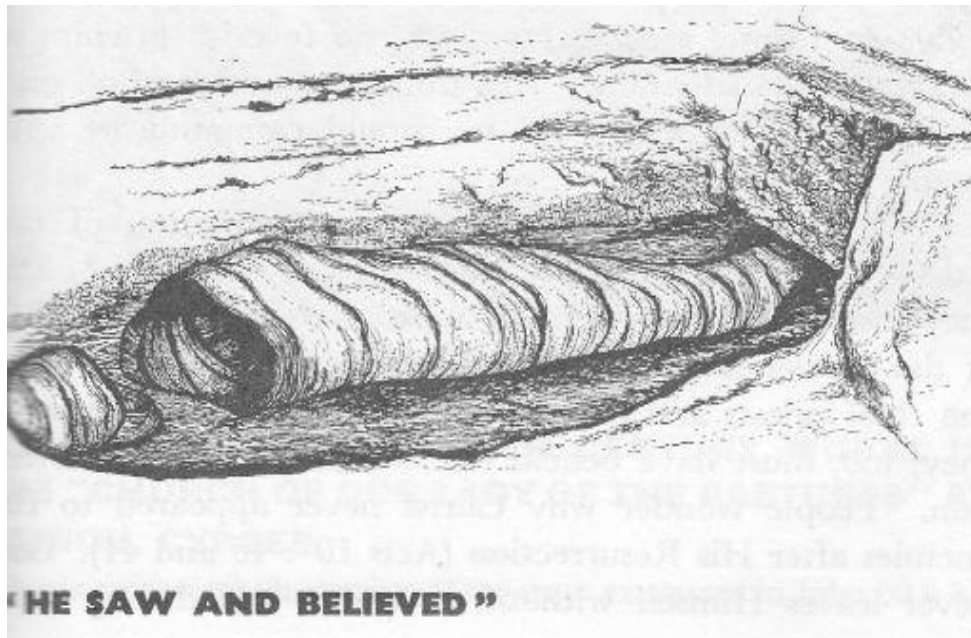
they were highly trained. The soldiers knew their lives were on the line if any of them lost a prisoner. In the book of Acts, we read of Peter, the Apostle, being imprisoned and four squads of four soldiers guarding him. When an angel brought him out, Herod had all sixteen Roman guards executed for losing their prisoner (Acts 12:4-19).

Let's now go further in the Gospel of John to chapter 20:

<sup>1</sup>Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. <sup>2</sup>So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!" <sup>3</sup>So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. <sup>4</sup>Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. <sup>5</sup>He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. <sup>6</sup>Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, <sup>7</sup>as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. <sup>8</sup>Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. <sup>9</sup>(They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) (John 20:1-9).

What do you think John saw that convinced him that Jesus was alive? (v. 8).

When the disciples first heard of the stone removed from the tomb's entrance, they assumed Jesus' body had been stolen. Mary Magdalene told Peter and John, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!" (John 20:2). John and Peter ran to the tomb, and the Scripture says that when John entered the empty tomb, he believed. We are left wondering what he saw that left him believing that Jesus had risen from the dead. A deep settled heart belief came to him when he saw the grave clothes.



The way I imagine it, the wrappings were probably stiff from the myrrh, aloes, and spices. The body passed through the wrappings, leaving something that could be said to resemble a cocoon of wrappings and spices. These intact wrappings are what I believe John saw and convinced him that Jesus was alive.

It is interesting to consider that when Mary Magdalene finally got back to the tomb and entered it, she saw two angels on either side of the place where Jesus was laid:

<sup>11</sup>Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb <sup>12</sup>and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot (John 20:11-12).

How symbolic of the Holy of Holies, where the two angels stood on either side of the Mercy Seat! At the very place where Christ's body was laid, now there were two attending angels at the head and the feet of the burial wrappings. His tomb now symbolized the very mercy seat of God! How symbolic also to consider that He was wrapped in white linen strips, which speaks of the high priesthood and purity, representing us before the Father and offering His own blood to make atonement for our sin!

### **Why So Many Details?**

Some doubters say that Jesus didn't die on the cross, i.e., He just fainted and later came awake. Let's think about that. Christ was pierced in the side with a spear, with blood and water, i.e., proof of death, coming from His side. His body was wrapped in seventy-five pounds of spices and sealed in a cold tomb with no food or water for three days and with a group of Roman soldiers outside the tomb. It goes against logical reason to think that He wasn't dead, and He just rolled the stone and walked past the guards. How could Jesus survive all this?

Equally ridiculous is the idea that His enemies stole the body. His enemies would not have wanted to allow Christ's followers to proclaim that Jesus had risen and was, therefore, divine. Matthew wrote that the Jewish leaders attempted to refute the resurrection by saying that the disciples stole the body and paid the Roman soldiers to go along with it (Matthew 28:11-15). No word ever came from the leaders to deny an empty tomb. Their "stolen body" theory admitted that the tomb was empty.

His disciples would also have no reason to steal the body, for they were overcome with sorrow after his death. After Christ's death, they hid away in fear of persecution. We also know that most of them suffered and died for their faith, based on the belief that Jesus was, indeed, Who He had claimed to be, viz., the Son of God. Why would they give their lives for what they would have known to be a lie if they had stolen the body? Then, of course, there were many appearances of the risen Lord Jesus over the next forty days, e.g., to five hundred people all at once, and some of them were still alive when Paul wrote about it (1 Corinthians 15:6).

Other critics say that the women went to the wrong tomb, but the guards overseeing the tomb were seen cowering on the ground (Matthew 28:4). Roman soldiers were not known to make mistakes. The Gospel writers go into great detail on Christ's resurrection because the crux of the Gospel story

hangs on this point. If there is no resurrection, there is no hope and no life after death. The fact remains that many of his followers were martyred because they were convinced that Christ was alive.

Even Jesus' disciples were bewildered and afraid. If He, Who had healed diseases and raised the dead, could not save Himself, how could He save them? Once they understood that He had risen, history and tradition tell us that many of the disciples went on to testify bravely, full of the Spirit, until their glorious deaths. John Foxe wrote a book we know today as *Foxes' Book of Martyrs*. It was published in 1563 under the title "*Acts and Monuments of These Latter and Perilous Days.*" In it, he records facts about the deaths of many of the disciples as reported by history and tradition. Here are some of the details that he offers in his book regarding the last days of the disciples of the early church:

James, the brother of John, was the first of the twelve apostles to be martyred and was said to be beheaded by order of King Herod Agrippa the 1st of Judea. The apostle Philip was scourged, thrown into prison, and then crucified. Mark, it is said, was dragged through the streets of Alexandria until he was torn to pieces after he spoke against a ceremony for their idol, Serapis. Peter was crucified upside down as he refused to be killed in the same manner as his Lord, feeling that he was not worthy of the same death. James the lesser (the brother of Jesus) was said to have been stoned, but some accounts state that he was thrown from the Temple Tower first, then his head was beaten in. Andrew, the brother of Peter, preached to many Asiatic nations and was crucified on an X shaped cross, which came to be known as St. Andrew's Cross. Little is known about Matthew's later life, but some writings say that he was pinned to the ground and beheaded in Ethiopia. Matthias was stoned at Jerusalem and then beheaded. Jude, the brother of James, was crucified in Edessa in Mesopotamia. Tradition states that Bartholomew went to East India to preach there and was crucified there. Thomas preached the gospel in Persia, Parthia, and India. In Calamina, India, he was tortured, run through with spears, and thrown in an oven. We do not know what happened to Luke. Some say he was hung from an olive tree, and other accounts state that he died of old age. The apostle John was arrested in Ephesus and sent to Rome where he was placed into a vessel of boiling oil that did not kill him. Then he was exiled to the Isle of Patmos, where he wrote the book of Revelation. After being released from Patmos, he returned to Ephesus, where he died about A.D. 98. Even with all of the persecutions and violent deaths, the Lord added to the Church daily.<sup>3</sup>

After considering the testimony of their deaths, do you think it is possible that the disciples would have given their lives for a lie? Whatever they experienced after the crucifixion so set their souls ablaze that they continued headlong in the face of persecutions and hardships to spread the Gospel and repeatedly tell of the acts of Jesus.

I urge you to consider this; If Jesus is God and did rise again, what is our response to Him? What impact does this have on our lives? If we believe He has indeed risen, then there must be an individual response to His claims. Each of us must decide if Christ is our King.

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<sup>3</sup> *The New Foxe's Book of Martyrs*, John Foxe. Updated by Harold J. Chadwick.



Prayer: Concerning a prayer, I would encourage each of you to make up your own prayer to the Father. Thank Him for His love for you, and if you have never given your life wholeheartedly to Him, there is no better day than today (Hebrews 3:15). If you need more information as to how to get your life right with God, you can read the study at the following link: [How Do I Become a Christian?](#)

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