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The Crucifixion and Burial (Part 1)



The Life and Teachings of Christ - Steve Gregg

In "The Crucifixion and Burial (Part 1)", Steve Gregg provides a detailed account of the crucifixion of Jesus, including the seven statements he made while on the cross and the significance of events such as the tearing of the veil in the temple. He notes that while the Gospels provide an objective account of the crucifixion, it is the prophets of the Old Testament and later writings and preaching of the apostles that give meaning to the event. Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Sanhedrin, took Jesus' body down from the cross and laid him in a tomb, fulfilling Scripture.

Transcript

Okay, let's turn to Matthew chapter 27. Matthew 27, and we're starting at verse 35. Now, we come to the story of the crucifixion itself.

Of course, it's been hinted at and anticipated for quite a bit throughout the Gospels, and most particularly the trial of Jesus and his arrest and all that stuff has been before our eyes in the passages we've most recently been studying. But we come to the actual crucifixion itself in this passage, and the passage has parallels in all the Gospels, of course, because it is the central gospel idea that Jesus was crucified. Now, none of the Gospels tell us that Jesus died for our sins.

They just tell us that he died. The Gospels just give the objective fact of the crucifixion, their history. They tell the history, the story of it.

It is the prophets of the Old Testament and the later writings and preaching of the apostles that bring out for us the meaning of his crucifixion. So, we do not find so clearly here, as we read in the Gospels, that he died for our sins. One could read this story and get the impression that it was just a tragic martyr who had, you know, tried to start a movement and failed.

But we know from other places in Scripture, including what the prophets, Isaiah in particular, had foretold, that the death of the Messiah was preordained for the, to be a sacrifice for sins. Well, beginning at Matthew, excuse me, Matthew 27, 35, it says, Then they crucified him and divided his garments, casting lots, that it might be fulfilled which

was spoken by the prophet. They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.

And sitting down they kept watch over him, and they put up over his head the accusation written against him, This is the king of the Jews. Now, they, in this case, are the Roman soldiers. They are the ones who actually did the physical act of crucifying Christ, although in the later writings and the preaching of the apostles, the blame for crucifying Jesus was laid at the door of the Jews.

Stephen said that they, the Jews, the Sanhedrin, had crucified Christ. Paul said the same thing in his preaching, and so did Peter. And so, the Jews were really held accountable by God for the crucifixion, though they instigated it only, and the actual work of hammering the nails in Jesus was done by Roman soldiers.

Now, we are told in Mark that the crucifixion occurred, in Mark 15, 25, that the crucifixion occurred at the, it is not 25, it is Mark 15, and in verse 25 it says, Now it was the third hour, and they crucified him. The third hour is to be reckoned by the Jewish manner of reckoning, by which the day begins at six in the morning. So, the third hour would be nine o'clock in the morning.

Jesus was crucified at nine in the morning. I do not know if it is significant, but it was exactly the same hour that the Holy Spirit fell on the day of Pentecost, 50 days later. Nine in the morning, the third hour.

Peter said so when he preached. He said, These are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is just the third hour of the day. So, that may or may not be significant, but it seems coincidental, if not, that Jesus was crucified at nine in the morning, and the Holy Spirit fell 50 days later at the same time in the morning, nine o'clock.

The Gospels would indicate that Jesus died at three in the afternoon. So, he was nailed to the cross at nine in the morning, and he spent six hours alive on the cross before he gave up the spirit. About three of those, the last three of those hours, of those six hours, it was dark.

But, we read one of the first things, is when they crucified him, they gambled for his cloak, or for his robe, and they cast lots for his cloak. This is seen as a fulfillment of a scripture that is found in the 22nd Psalm, which is one of the better known Messianic Psalms. In 22:18 of Psalms, it says, They divided my garments among them and cast for my clothing lots.

I know it from the King James, and they are quoting it a little differently here. There are two things that they did to Jesus' garments. One was that his garment, his woven robe, was valuable, and they didn't tear it up.

They gambled for it. His cloak was an ordinary piece of cloth. They tore it into four pieces

for the four guards.

So, we are told in John's Gospel, in John 19, 23 and 24, and the Psalm itself mentions both these things, parting his garments and casting lots for his vesture. There is a very specific prophecy that was fulfilled on this occasion. Then the guards sat down to watch him die.

It says in verse 36, And they did put over his head the accusation written, This is Jesus, the King of the Jews. Now, other Gospels have told us that this accusation, or this accusation, this plaque, This is Jesus, the King of the Jews, was written in three languages, Hebrew and Latin, so that people of all different places could, from all different places and speak different languages, could hear it or read it. John's Gospel tells us, in John 19, 20 and 22, that the Jews objected to this.

It was Pilate who ordered this superscription to be placed over Christ. This is Jesus, the King of the Jews. In John 19, verses 21 and 22, it says that the Jews objected and said, No, why don't you have it say, He said, I am the King of the Jews.

And Pilate's response was, What I have written, I have written. And it leaves us to wonder why Pilate wrote that and why he did not change it. There is, of course, the impression given, perhaps, that Pilate thought the title was well chosen.

Now, he had been accused of being the King of the Jews, and of course, Pilate would never wish to agree to that since the Caesar was the King of the Jews, as well as the King of the world. But some have felt that, you know, because Pilate was so moved by his interaction with Jesus, that he felt some kind of tribute to him should be given. Although others have felt that Pilate put this sign up there as a mockery to the Jews.

After all, Jesus was an emaciated, mangled human being hanging on a cross. His visage had been so marred more than any man, hardly looking human anymore, covered with blood, naked, crucified in humiliation. It's thought that maybe by calling him the King of the Jews was just a way of, you know, insulting the Jews.

Look at the kind of king these people have. And that could be true also. In any case, Pilate did not change it much to the Jews' displeasure.

Verse 38, Then two robbers were crucified with him, one on the right and another on the left. And those who passed by blasphemed him, wagging their heads and saying, You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself. If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.

Likewise, the chief priest, also mocking with the scribes and elders, said, He saved others, himself he cannot save. If he is the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. He trusted in God, let him deliver him now, if he will have him, for he said, I'm the Son of God.

And even the robbers who were crucified with him reviled him with the same thing. Now, Jesus was mocked while on the cross by the crowds and by the Jewish leaders who had had him executed, and also by the thieves that were on either side of him. Matthew does not tell us, but Luke does, that later on one of these thieves changed his tune and was converted.

According to Luke 23, verses 39 through 43, one of the thieves stopped mocking, and when his companion continued to mock Jesus, the thief objected and said, Listen, leave the guy alone. We are criminals, we deserve what we are getting. This man has done nothing wrong.

And then that thief who had rebuked his fellow thief had said, turn to Jesus and say, Lord, remember me when you enter into your kingdom. This is Luke 23, verses 39 through 43. And it's a remarkable thing, really.

I mean, it's clear that Luke is not representing this as a mockery of Jesus. It could sound like one. Here's a man who is about to perish, a man who is about to die, that is Jesus, hanging by nails on a cross.

He looks about as little like a king as anyone could ever be. And he looks like a man with no future. And yet the thief says, Remember me when you come into your kingdom.

The man, we could think, was mocking Jesus, except that Jesus said to him, Verily, verily, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise, indicating that this man, in fact, had been converted. But just think of the kind of faith this man would have to have. He's dying on a cross.

Turns to someone else who's dying on a cross and says, You know, when you come into your kingdom. You know, even the disciples had very little concept of a spiritual kingdom. Even they thought that the death of Jesus was the end of it.

They didn't expect him to die, even though he'd warned them that he would. They didn't quite grasp it. And when he died, it seems they gave up hope for the kingdom.

Remember the men on the road to Emmaus said to Jesus, whom they didn't recognize after his resurrected form, they said, We had hoped that this might be the one that God was going to deliver us by. We had hoped, suggested they'd given up hope by this time, which was a shame. But the thief must have gotten a revelation from her, just like Peter did.

You know, flesh and blood had not revealed it to him, but the father did, that this death of Jesus was in no sense going to be the end of it. And how encouraging to Jesus at that moment to see his father vindicate him in that respect. You know, here, Jesus was innocent, as we know.

He was everything they were mocking him for calling himself. He was capable of coming down from the cross without question. He could have called 12 legions of angels and they would have saved him.

And people are throwing this in his face saying, Oh, you say you're the son of God. You say you're the king of the Jews. You say all these things.

Well, you know, we'll believe you if you prove it and come down off the cross. And how great that temptation must have been to him to just do it, you know, just come on down and prove that he was who he was. He knew who he was, but he didn't.

He ignored them. And it must seem when you don't defend yourself against people who are mocking and finding fault, it must seem like, boy, I'm just, you know, there's no way my reputation will be saved here. But when one of these thieves turns to him and says, I believe in you, even after the thief had been mocking him, it's clear that God just kind of gave him a jolt of revelation.

And the guy realized, well, this is the king of the Jews. I mean, the crowds that were jeering at Jesus were certainly implying that if you ever appeared to be a king of the Jews, you certainly don't have any credibility to make that claim now. Look at you now.

And Jesus in his natural man would have probably tended to think the same way. I guess I don't look very much like a king of the Jews now, do I? I mean, not that Jesus doubted that he was, but if I were in Jesus' position, I'd be thinking, well, who's going to believe in me now, you know? And here the thief turns and says, I believe in you. You know, when you come into your kingdom, remember me.

And that must have been, God must have done that just to encourage Jesus, because that thief had to have a supernatural revelation that God didn't have to give him. But to see, you know, that against all the seemings, against all the evidence of what was taking place, that this man, Jesus, did have a future and a kingdom, even though it looked like he was dying and it was the end for him. This was for, no doubt, to encourage Jesus as well as for the salvation of the thief.

Where they say in verse 43, he trusted in God, let him deliver him now, if he will have him, is a quote from Psalm 22, 8. I already mentioned Psalm 22 with reference to the soldiers parting his garments. That's predicted in Psalm 22, 18. But in Psalm 22, 8, well, I imagine all of you are quite familiar with Psalm 22.

It's one of the better known Psalms. But as you know, it is also the Psalm that Jesus quoted from the cross. We haven't read that part yet, but Psalm 22, 1 says, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? And then down in a little further, verse 6, he says, I'm a worm and no man, a reproach of men and despised of the people.

All those who see me laugh at me. They laugh me to scorn. They shoot out the lip.

They shake their heads saying, he trusted in the Lord. Let him rescue him. Let him deliver him since he delights in him.

The exact quote of what they actually said to him. And little did they know that by saying those things, they were in fact fulfilling this very prophecy about the Messiah. So there we have it.

Now we go to verse 45. Now from the sixth hour until the ninth, now the sixth hour would be noon, until the ninth, which would be three in the afternoon, there was darkness over all the land. So according to Mark, Jesus was crucified at the third hour, that's nine in the morning.

And then from noon to three in the afternoon, which is the second half of the time that Jesus was alive on the cross, there was, it was dark all over the land. And about the ninth hour, Jesus cried out with a loud voice saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani, which is my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? And that is of course the quote from Psalm 22, 1. So in this one account in Matthew, we have three different places where the narrative connects with Psalm 22. Now Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani is the first thing of Christ that is recorded in Matthew from the cross.

However, when you combine the accounts of the four gospels, there were apparently seven different things that Jesus said during those six hours, seven recorded statements of Christ during those six hours he spent on the cross. Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani seems to have been perhaps chronologically the fourth of seven statements. I'll give you what those are and tell you where they're found in different gospels.

In Luke 23, 34, we were told that Jesus, when they were crucifying him, when they were nailing him, apparently, he said, father, forgive them, they know not what they do. That was his first saying from the cross, father, forgive them for they know not what they do. Now the Romans, of course, didn't have a clue what they were doing.

They just thought they were a criminal. They didn't know who he was. The Sanhedrin knew more.

They knew more what they were doing, but even they didn't know the full extent of the crime they were committing against God. And Jesus, though they had not repented, he interceded for them. He made intercession for the transgressors, it says in Isaiah 53.

And so there he was making intercession for those who put him to death. That's Luke 23, 34. His second statement from the cross is that which I mentioned a moment ago, when he spoke to the thief on the cross and said, today you will be with me in paradise.

That was in Luke 23, verse 43. Luke 23, 43, he said to the thief who repented, he said, today you'll be with me in paradise. And of course, that raised questions about what paradise is, where paradise is, and where Jesus went that day, since he said he'd be with

him that day.

There is, of course, the view that Jesus went to Hades at the point of his death, and yet he said he was going to be that day in paradise. It is perhaps a way to harmonize those two facts, to say that paradise, that he was referring to, was not to be equated with heaven, but was to be equated with the place that Jesus elsewhere called Abraham's bosom, which was in Hades, apparently. It was a portion of Hades where the righteous, who died in faith, went prior to his own crucifixion and resurrection.

After that, people who died in faith apparently go directly to the presence of God, but paradise may have been his way of speaking of that place that Abraham was, and where Lazarus had gone when Lazarus and the rich men had died, and so forth. In any case, one could therefore be said to be in Hades and in paradise at the same time. It's just that Hades wasn't all that, you know, we think of Hades as hell, but not everything about Hades necessarily had to be a reference to some torment.

The third thing he said on the cross is found in John 19, verses 26 and 27. He saw his mother at the foot of the cross, and we're told that he said, Woman, behold your son. One would think that by that he meant, Look at me, I'm your son.

Look at the condition I'm in now, mom. But John was there at the foot of the cross, and he said to John, Behold your mother, meaning that Mary would be like a mother to him. And behold, your son therefore might be saying to his mother, Recognize John as a son to you, since I'm gone.

Of course, Jesus resurrected, but he never came back home to live with his mother or support or anything like that. She was apparently a widow at this time, because John tells us in that passage, which is John 19, 26 and 27, that John forever afterwards took Mary home to support her. Now, of course, there are those who feel that when Jesus said, Behold your mother, speaking to John about Mary, that Jesus was basically telling all Christians that Mary is the mother of all Christians.

She's our holy mother. However, there's certainly nothing in the passage that would suggest that. Essentially, he was commissioning John to take care of his widowed mother, whom Jesus as firstborn son would no longer be in the position to do.

Basically, he's asking John to move into his position as the oldest surviving son, apparently because Jesus' own brothers were not saved, were not believers. It was preferable to have one of his disciples take care of his mother in his mind. They were his true mother and brethren and sisters.

So John was actually kind of adopted Mary and she adopted him and he became the grown son that she could look to for support for the rest of her life, according to John's gospel on that point. Then the fourth saying from the cross is what we just read in

Matthew 27, 46. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Now, the meaning of this saying has been bandied about.

I actually have talked to enough unbelievers to know that there's a lot of misunderstanding about this statement. I don't know about you, maybe you've been unbelievers recently enough that you can remember having such a misunderstanding, but a lot of people have felt that Jesus, you know, his faith failed him at this point. They feel like he really, you know, he began to have doubts about God.

And his statement, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me, is sometimes construed in the mind of some to be an evidence that Jesus was now disillusioned and frustrated and felt like here he'd been faithful to God at this point and now God had bailed on him and he was left holding the bag, as it were, and like he's complaining about this. Well, I can understand that misunderstanding. I mean, obviously his words sound a little that way.

However, I personally think we're to understand that Jesus was declaring a statement of fact, namely that God had abandoned him, which is something that he knew was going to happen. He was not disillusioned about it. It's the very thing that he was sweating blood about the night before, was that he was going to undergo the total abandonment of God for our sins.

And I think that his quotation there of Psalm 22.1 was his way of declaring that that is what he was experiencing at that moment, the total abandonment from God that bearing the sins of the world subjected him to. So that's my understanding. But some people say that at the festival, it was customary for the high priest to call out the opening verse of some scriptural passage for the people to either like to respond responsibly, sort of have a what they call a diaphanal or what do they call it? I don't know.

Antiphonal sort of a quotation of the Psalm. Yeah, I forget what they call it. Antiphonal, I guess, is what they call it, where the priest calls out one verse and the people answer back another verse and so forth.

And some people see in Jesus' comment here simply the desire to quote Psalm 22, the opening verse, so that the people would call to mind the rest of the Psalm and realize as they would recall the contents of that Psalm that they were watching the fulfillment of before their eyes, because that's the only Psalm, the only place in the Old Testament that graphically describes the crucifixion. It specifically says, they pierced my hands and my feet, my bones are out of joint, I can see all my bones, my bodily fluids are all dried up and stuff, and all those things seem to be a description of Jesus on the cross. In any case, whatever his reasoning for saying it, I believe that it expresses a true fact that he was abandoned by God on that moment.

And, of course, it should have called to mind to anyone who is scripturally literate at that

time, the fact that he was, in fact, in the position of the psalmist in Psalm 22 and that there was a fulfillment taking place of that Psalm right there. Now, there are three other statements of Christ from the cross. I might as well mention them now because it's not entirely clear exactly what point they took place.

Jesus was on the cross for six hours, and we're not really told precisely the timing of all the things he said, but his fifth saying from the cross is found in John 19, 28, very near to the point that he ended at the very end. Just before he yielded up the goats, he said, I thirst, John 19, 28, I thirst, and somebody came and gave him a sponge with some vinegar on it, and he tasted it, and then his next statement apparently was, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit, or I commit my spirit. That is recorded in Luke, in Luke 23, 46.

In Luke 23, 46, Jesus said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit. This is actually a quote from a Psalm also, Psalm 31, 5. It's also, from what I'm told, the childhood prayer that every Jewish child learned at his mother's knee, comparable to the modern, now I lay me down to sleep kind of a prayer. Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit.

You know, even that childhood prayer, now I lay me down to sleep, I pray to your Lord, my soul to keep, the idea being, I'm not, I'm going to be asleep, I can't watch over my soul, you keep it for me. And apparently Psalm 31, 5 was a prayer like that, that Jewish children learned at bedtime, a bedtime prayer. You know, into your hands I commit my spirit.

I can't keep it while I'm asleep, you keep it for me. And so Mary at the foot of the cross, who no doubt had been the one to teach him that prayer when he was probably two or three years old, and heard him pray that as his very first prayer in all likelihood, as a little Jewish boy, also heard that as his final prayer on the cross, having totally different ramifications. We're told in 1 Peter that Jesus didn't threaten and didn't retaliate when he was abused, but he committed himself to him who judges righteously, and he did so verbally.

He said, into your hands I commit my spirit. And the final saying of Jesus, and I have a feeling the last three happened sort of in rapid succession, the way it's told in John, I have that impression. But John 19, 30 gives the last thing that Jesus said before he died, and that was, it is finished.

And he gave up the goat when he said that. It is finished in the Greek is one word, tetelestai. I don't know what it is in the Aramaic that Jesus spoke, but the Greek word used by John to record it.

This is John 19, 30. Tetelestai is from what I've been told, a term that had a military use. It was a cry of victory.

And so it is finished doesn't mean all is lost, which one might otherwise think. It means the battle is finished because he's won it. And then he gave up the spirit.

He had overcome the world. He'd been faithful unto death and had conquered him that had the power of death, that is the devil. And there would be no more trials for him.

There'd be no more testing. He'd gone through 33 or more years of testing, just like you and I do over a period of however long our lives are. And he declared that he had conquered.

This was his last breath, as it were. I've won, or we've won, is basically kind of what it means. And so those are the seven saints of Jesus from the cross.

Only one occurs in Matthew. And that's the one we just saw at verse 46. Now verse 47.

Some of those who stood there, when they heard him say, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani, said, this man is calling for Elijah. Immediately one of them ran, took a sponge, filled it with sour wine and put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink. According to John, they did this because he said, I thirst.

So he must have said, I thirst immediately after he said, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani. Because after he said that, we're told in John 19, 28, that he said, I thirst. And someone took this sponge and raised it up to him on a stick, gave him something to drink.

Now, when he did that, in verse 49, the rest said, let him alone. Let us see if Elijah will come to save him. Now, this must have been frustrating to Jesus.

In his hour of anguish, he cries out and they misunderstand him what it is he said. Eli, Eli, sounds apparently close enough to Elias. That they mistook the word.

Elias is the Greek word for Elijah. Eli is the Aramaic word for my God. So he said, Eli, Eli, my God, my God.

But they, at least the Greek speakers in there, thought he was speaking Greek and calling for Elijah because the Greek word is Elias. And thought that's what he said. So they go, he's calling for Elijah to come.

Let's see if he comes and so forth. And here, you know, they're missing his point entirely. And then it says in verse 50, Jesus, when he had cried out again with a loud voice, yielded up his spirit.

He doesn't say what Jesus cried out, but we know from the other Gospels that we just looked at, he cried out, Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit. And he said, it is finished. Those are his last words.

And he cried out and he yielded up his spirit. And we're told in verse 51, and behold, the

veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom and the earthquake and the rocks were split and the graves were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised and coming out of the graves after his resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many.

Now this looks a little forward to his resurrection. It kind of says some things by way of anticipation. So there was an earthquake and the graves opened and many dead bodies came out.

And after his resurrection, they came out and went to the city. Now the earthquake may have taken place at the very moment Jesus gave up the ghost. We also know there was an earthquake on the morning of his resurrection, the earthquake and the angel moved the stone and so forth and Jesus came out.

It's possible that this earthquake and these bodies came out only occurred at his resurrection. They are told at this point, at the time of his dying. It's not all that clear.

You know, the way it reads, you get the impression that these graves were open and people came to life when Jesus died, but they didn't come out of the graves until he rose from the dead, which is very unlikely to be the meaning since it's hard to believe people would come to life and just lay in their graves for three days and then wait for Jesus to get up and then they get up. I think it's likely that this is just, you know, it does say after his resurrection, they came forth and were seen in the holy city in Jerusalem. We are trying to assume that the, perhaps we should say that there was an earthquake when he died and the rumbling of the earth may have opened up some of the sepulchers, the stones that were covering them and so forth may have been dislodged by the great earthquake and that made it possible for the dead to come out after he was raised when Jesus was raised.

There's a lot of mystery about this particular passage as to its exact meaning. Who were these dead people who came out? It says essentially that they were saints who had fallen asleep. Saint means holy one.

And yet, if we think of the saints who had fallen asleep, we might think of people like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob or Moses or people like that, but it hardly could mean them because they would have been dead for so long that no one alive had ever seen them alive and wouldn't recognize them when they came out. No one would know for sure who these guys were. They could say, I'm Abraham, but it wouldn't be convincing because no one knows what Abraham looked like.

Furthermore, if they were the bodies of people who were thoroughly decomposed, like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, those ancient guys, David, then we would have to have here a miracle very similar to the resurrection of Jesus himself, the giving of a glorified body, the restoration of decomposed flesh. That could happen. But the Bible indicates in 1

Corinthians 15 that in terms of the order of resurrection, it says Christ is the first fruit and afterward, those who are his at his coming, which suggests that in order of resurrection appearances, Jesus is the first resurrected and next is us at his second coming.

So that it sounds like between the time he resurrected and the time that we're resurrected, there's no one else resurrected in the sense that he was. Now, there's been people raised from the dead both before and after Christ, but these were people whose bodies had simply died usually within a few minutes or hours previously. In the case of Lazarus, it had been four days, but that was the longest time.

Even in the days of Elijah and Elisha, some dead persons who had recently died were raised, but not people who had been thoroughly decomposed, whose bodies had to be reconstructed from scratch almost. And that would seem to require what the resurrection in time is going to be, the glorification of and reassembling of bodies that have totally gone otherwise. So my thought is that these people were probably recently dead.

There were a fair number of godly Jews around of the remnant, people like old Simeon and Anna and so forth. And people would have recognized them when they came out and it's possible that these were just a few people who had died in recent days and who came forward or who had not been greatly decomposed. I don't know.

No one really knows. The passage is sketchy. No other passage in the Bible refers to this phenomenon.

It's only Matthew, and so we're left to only guess about it. Now, the tearing of the veil in the temple, of course, is a symbolic thing. It really happened, but it was symbolic because the veil separated the holy place from the Holy of Holies in the temple, and the Holy of Holies was the place that no one could go except the high priest once a year.

It was the immediate presence of God in the Jewish ritual. And that being so, the ripping of the veil supernaturally was to declare that the way into the Holy of Holies was now accessible through what Jesus did. People could come in now because the door was open, as it were, into the Holy of Holies because Jesus made a new and living way into the holiest of all, it says in Hebrews 10.

Now, verse 54 says, when the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they feared greatly, saying, truly, this was the Son of God. At least one of the Gospels has them saying, certainly, this was a righteous man. There were four centurions there.

It's possible that they talked among themselves as to what the meaning of this was. One of them may have said, boy, this is the Son of God. In fact, one of them may have just

said, this is a righteous man.

Another may have amplified it and said, no, I think he's the Son of God. That's what they said he was. Certainly sounds like they were right.

In any case, what we have here in Matthew, and we have this consistently in Matthew, a reference to Gentiles, in this case, Roman centurions, coming to faith in Christ, declaring him to be the Son of God before his own Jewish people or even his own disciples were willing to come to that point in faith. Of course, his disciples, some of them had said that he was the Son of God earlier, but they began to have their doubts at this point, whereas the centurions and the thief on the cross both seemed to recognize him at this point. Hard to say.

The Romans may have been more superstitious. They might have just said, wow, all these things are happening. Zeus is angry.

He's got maybe a son of a god or something. Hard to know how much superstition reigned in these pagan minds, but certainly this is recorded to show that even the centurions woke up to the fact that they had crucified somebody who was far more than what they realized and even speculated he was the Son of God. Many women who followed Jesus from Galilee ministering to him were there looking on from afar, among whom were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of Zebedee's sons.

Now, there's two other places that list these women, and it's basically by comparison the three passages that list these women that we come to the conclusion I mentioned much earlier in the year that the sons of Zebedee, James and John, were apparently first cousins of Jesus. I'll show you the other two passages and how this is deduced, all right? If you look over at Mark chapter 15, Mark chapter 15 and verse 40, it says, there were also women looking on from afar, among whom were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the less, and of Joseph, and Salome, okay? Now, here we have Mary Magdalene is in both lists, and then there's a Mary, Matthew says, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, that's apparently Mary the mother of James the less and Joseph in Mark, and then there's the one who's called in Matthew the mother of Zebedee's sons, that'd be the mother of James and John then, and she is named Salome in Mark's gospel, okay? Now, if you compare that, so we know that Zebedee's sons were their mother was Salome. Let's look at John chapter 19 and verse 25, and we'll get the final piece of evidence on this.

John 19 and verse 25, it says, now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother and his mother's sister, Mary, the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene, okay? Now, there's only three women mentioned here, Salome is not one of them, so we can see this is not a complete account, but there are two, well, here's how it reads, Jesus' mother and his mother's sister, Mary, the wife of Cleophas. Some people think that Mary, the wife of Cleophas, is the one who's said to be Jesus' mother's sister. That could hardly be,

because then two sisters both would be named Mary.

Jesus' mother's name was Mary, and for her to have a sister named Mary would seem very unlikely. I've never known a family yet who gave the same name to two of their offspring, and therefore it's probably that Mary's sister, that is, his mother's sister is a reference to Salome, who is mentioned in the other Gospels as being there, but is not mentioned here by name. So you've got four women then mentioned here.

You've got Mary, the mother of Jesus, an unnamed sister of Mary, the mother of Jesus, another Mary, the wife of Cleophas, who must have been the mother of James and Joseph, according to the other list, and Mary Magdalene. All this list tells us then is that Mary, the mother of Jesus, was with these other three women, and in the place of the name of Salome, the mother of Zebulun's children, we have the expression, the sister of Jesus, Jesus' mother's sister. That expression takes the place of Salome in the other list.

So Salome is apparently the sister of Mary, and therefore her children would be Jesus' cousins. James and John were the first cousins of Jesus, apparently, based on this comparison of the text. OK, let's move along here.

Verse 57. Now when the evening had come, there was a rich man from Arimathea named Joseph, who himself had also become a disciple of Jesus. Now we're told in Luke 23.51 that this man Joseph was a member of the Sanhedrin, but he had been a dissenting member.

He had not approved of the Sanhedrin's decision to put Jesus to death. Now we're not told whether he had been at the meeting where Jesus was condemned and disapproved, but was overruled by the rest, or whether he had not been invited because they knew he disapproved of their plans. But in any case, there were some members of the Sanhedrin, and Luke tells us in Luke 23.51 that Joseph of Arimathea was one of these dissenters.

The other was Nicodemus. And in John 19.39, we're told that Joseph and Nicodemus came to Pilate to request the privilege of burying Jesus. So John 19.39 mentions that Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea both came out of the closet boldly.

They were both Sanhedrin members, and they came out and took a public, you know, a risky stand, really. I mean, basically registering their disapproval of what the Sanhedrin had done. They came forward and publicly asked Pilate for the right to bury the body of Jesus.

So these were secret disciples of Jesus in the Sanhedrin. Joseph of Arimathea, and it says he had also become a disciple of Jesus. And it says in verse 58, this man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.

Now, Mark tells us in Mark 15, verses 44 and 45, that Pilate marveled. He actually thought, is he dead already? Because Jesus had only been on the cross six hours. It was

not unusual for a man to live three days on a cross.

He didn't bleed to death, generally speaking. Not quickly, anyway. There was not a lot of blood that would come out from those nail wounds.

Not enough for a man generally to bleed to death before it coagulated. But they would die of stress and exhaustion and bleeding and infection and, you know, also from suffocation. Because from what I've read, when a person is hanging by his arms over a long period of time, it begins to interfere with the muscular activity that allows breathing to take place.

And that's why they actually nailed their feet to a pedestal on the cross. So that they could lift up the weight of their body off of their arms to breathe properly. And they could use their legs to catch a breath so they wouldn't just suffocate.

It is believed that this is why we are told in another gospel that the legs of the thieves on the cross were broken to hasten their death. Jesus' legs were not broken, according to John chapter 19, because he was already dead when they came to him. And the fact that he died so quickly is the gospel's way of telling us that he didn't die of natural causes.

He didn't die of crucifixion. He died on a cross, but he didn't die of crucifixion. People die much more slowly than that when they die of crucifixion.

And the two thieves were still alive and would have remained alive probably for a few days had their legs broken. But Jesus had already surrendered to death. He had already committed his spirit to God.

He had said earlier, no one can take my life from me. I have the power to lay it down, I have the power to take it up again. He said that back, I think, in chapter 10 of John.

But the point here is that Jesus died so rapidly, Pilate was astonished. It doesn't usually go this fast. And that's what Mark tells us.

Pilate actually sent a messenger to the side of the cross to find out if he really was dead. And the messenger came back and reported that he was. That's in Mark 15, 44 and 45.

And then it says, here in this passage, verse 58, Then Pilate commanded that the body would be given to them. Now, he didn't have to humor them. A man who was crucified as a criminal, generally speaking, was a felon.

A person whose body would be thrown into the fires of the Valley of Hinnom, where criminals' bodies were disposed of. But Pilate had been very positively impressed with Jesus, as we know. And these members of the Sanhedrin, no doubt, when he saw that there were some of them disagreeing with the rest of the Sanhedrin, he realized that the Sanhedrin had been a kangaroo court that had unjustly condemned an innocent man.

And Pilate, hoping not to probably do any further injustices, was willing at least to give him a decent burial, so he surrendered the body to them. He didn't have to do that. And when Joseph of Arimathea had taken the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, he laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out of rock, he rolled a large stone against the door of the tomb and departed.

And Mary Magdalene was there, and the other Mary, sitting opposite the tomb. Now, there are some other details of Jesus' burial that are given in John's Gospel and nowhere else. So let's take a moment to look over there.

John chapter 19, verses 31 through 42. Actually, we're going to pick it up here a little bit before his actual death, so we're moving backward a little bit in the story, and then we'll read on through to his burial. John 19, verse 31 says, Therefore, because it was the preparation day that the body should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath, for that Sabbath was a high day, that is, it was the Passover season, a special Sabbath, the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, that they might be taken away.

Now, the Jews didn't want these dead bodies hanging around alive, or I mean half dead, half alive, or even dying and hanging up there on the Sabbath. They wouldn't be able on the Sabbath to take them down. And so they wanted them to die quickly, and they could take them down now before the Sabbath came.

And so they asked Pilate if they could have, as a special provision, these guys hastened to their death by breaking their legs. And so the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and the other who was crucified with them. Nothing excruciating, but they were already in a fair amount of pain, and that quickly brought an end to their lives.

But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs, but one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out. And he who has seen, meaning John, who wrote this, has testified, and his testimony is true. He was right there at the cross.

He saw the blood and water come out. And he knows that he's telling the truth, so that you may believe. For these things were done that the scripture should be fulfilled, not one of his bones shall be broken.

And again, another scripture says, they shall look on me, or on him whom they have pierced. The second scripture is from Zechariah 12. The first scripture is probably from Exodus.

It's not certain, but in Exodus 12, 46, in describing the Passover lamb, and how the Passover lamb was...