

Copied from bibleref.com

Isaiah 50:4-9 Page 1

Psalms 118:19-29 Page 2

Philippians 2:5-11 Page 2

Matthew 26:1-27:66 Page 8

Isaiah chapter 50

New International Version

1 This is what the LORD says: 'Where is your mother's certificate of divorce with which I sent her away? Or to which of my creditors did I sell you? Because of your sins you were sold; because of your transgressions your mother was sent away. **2** When I came, why was there no one? When I called, why was there no one to answer? Was my arm too short to deliver you? Do I lack the strength to rescue you? By a mere rebuke I dry up the sea, I turn rivers into a desert; their fish rot for lack of water and die of thirst.

3 I clothe the heavens with darkness and make sackcloth its covering.' **4** The Sovereign LORD has given me a well-instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being instructed. **5** The Sovereign LORD has opened my ears; I have not been rebellious, I have not turned away. **6** I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting. **7** Because the Sovereign LORD helps me, I will not be disgraced. Therefore have I set my face like flint, and I know I will not be put to shame. **8** He who vindicates me is near. Who then will bring charges against me? Let us face each other! Who is my accuser? Let him confront me!

9 It is the Sovereign LORD who helps me. Who will condemn me? They will all wear out like a garment; the moths will eat them up.

Psalm chapter 118

Open for me the gates of the righteous; I will enter and give thanks to the LORD. 20 This is the gate of the LORD through which the righteous may enter.

21 I will give you thanks, for you answered me; you have become my salvation.

22 The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; 23 the LORD has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes.

24 The LORD has done it this very day; let us rejoice today and be glad.

25 LORD, save us! LORD, grant us success! 26 Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD. From the house of the LORD we bless you.

27 The LORD is God, and he has made his light shine on us. With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession up to the horns of the altar.

28 You are my God, and I will praise you; you are my God, and I will exalt you. 29 Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever.

Philippians chapter 2

New International Version

1 Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, 2 then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. 3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, 4 not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

5 In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; 7 rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death-- even death on a cross! 9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Context Summary

Philippians 2:1–5 connects the blessings of Christianity with corresponding results in a Christian's life. We experience comfort, encouragement, love, and unity as saved believers in Christ. As a result, we ought to express comfort, encouragement, love, and unity to our fellow believers. Here again, Paul emphasizes that how a Christian thinks—how they frame their attitude—is crucial to living a Christian life. This sets up a classic description of Jesus Christ's sacrifice on our behalf, starting in verse 6.

Philippians 2:5, NIV: In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

What does Philippians 2:5 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

This verse serves to set up the poetic description of verses 6–11. The mind Paul refers to is the focus of Christ's life, which is humility. Paul clearly feels this is something the Philippian believers have, or at least have access to, as Christians. The attitude of a believer is to resemble the attitude of Christ. This is made clear in the verses to follow.

In the upcoming passage, Paul will describe how Christ, though God, took the form of a servant, was born human, lived obediently, and died innocently on a cross (Philippians 2:6–8). His humility led to being exalted or lifted up (Philippians 2:9). In a similar way, believers are to live humbly after the example of Jesus. Doing so will please God, and result in our eternal benefit. Paul's focus on the "mind" is clear here and elsewhere in this letter. The Philippians were to have one mind (Philippians 1:27; 2:2). They were not to set their minds on earthly things (Philippians 3:19). In addition, the peace of God would guard their hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:7). The mind that follows Christ produces a life that obeys Christ.

Context Summary

Philippians 2:6–11 is a poetic description of Jesus' willingness to humble Himself for our sake. Rather than coming first as God and King, Jesus freely took on the

form of a human being. He was humiliated and oppressed, following the will of the Father, in order to be the sacrifice for our sins. As a result, "Jesus" will be given the ultimate glory and honor. Eventually, all people, whether they want to or not, will admit that Jesus Christ is, in fact, Lord. For some, this will happen too late.

Philippians 2:6, NIV: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;

What does Philippians 2:6 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Many Bible translations offset verses 6–11, since they follow a poetic structure used in early hymns in the church. The beginning of this verse refers to Jesus as being "in the form of God." In other words, Jesus and God are equal. Contrary to skeptics who claim the divinity of Jesus was "invented" later in church history, Paul frequently addressed Jesus as divine in his letters.

The second part of this verse notes the stark contrast between how Jesus could have behaved, and how He actually lived. He could have come to earth to demand every person grovel in front of Him. Instead of treating others as His servants, He became a servant to the people He had created. Again, the emphasis on "equality with God" clearly shows Paul's belief that Jesus is equal with God the Father. Yet Jesus did not "grasp" or hold on to His positional authority. He instead came humbly as a servant, giving His life to serve others.

Philippians 2:7, NIV: rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

What does Philippians 2:7 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Rather than coming to earth to demand others serve Him, Jesus "emptied himself." This does not mean Jesus stopped being God. Rather than coming the first time as a king, Jesus chose not to exhibit His unlimited powers. He came to

serve rather than to be served (Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45). He chose the "form" of a servant rather than the "form" of God (Philippians 2:6).

One way Jesus came as a servant was taking on the limitations of a human body. Though eternal, Jesus entered earth as an infant. He was born to His mother Mary, who remained a virgin until His birth (Matthew 1:25). He was born in a humble situation, coming into this world among the animals in a stable, and sleeping in a feed trough (Luke 2:1–7). The first people to visit Him were not kings, but shepherds (Luke 2:8–20). His birth was common, yet His life was anything but common. His humility is emphasized in this verse as the example believers are to follow.

Philippians 2:8, NIV: And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death-- even death on a cross!

What does Philippians 2:8 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

The first phrase here completes the thought begun in verse 7: that Jesus came to earth in human form as a servant. In addition, Jesus both was born and died in humility. His humbleness was not for show, but was part of being "obedient." In a similar way, Paul encouraged his readers to be humble in obedience to Christ, following both the example of Jesus and of Paul.

The last phrase of this verse refers to the horrific death of crucifixion. The cross was clearly a symbol of death in first century culture. Paul's mention of it here reminds us that the cross was more than a painful death. It was also a degrading, humiliating form of execution. Jesus did not die as a hero on a battlefield, but instead died innocently and shamefully in public view outside the city walls of Jerusalem. He was mocked, yet endured scorn as part of God's plan for His life as a sacrifice for sinners.

Philippians 2:9, NIV: Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name,

What does Philippians 2:9 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

The opening word "Therefore" refers to the previous context of verses 6–8. Jesus became the greatest example of a humble servant, through coming to earth in humility, living in obedience, and dying on the cross. As a result, "God has highly exalted him." In the two other places in the Bible where the phrase "highly exalted" is used, we find interesting connections. In 1 Chronicles 14:2, David's kingdom was "highly exalted." In Psalm 47:9, God Himself was "highly exalted." Jesus was highly exalted both as the coming Son of David and as the Lord.

The last phrase of this verse notes that the name of Jesus (Philippians 2:10) is a name honored and empowered above every other name on earth. This name, *Yeshua* in the original Hebrew, means "God saves," and was predicted before His birth. Both Mary and Joseph were told this name while Jesus was still in the womb (Luke 1:31; Matthew 1:21). He fulfilled the prophecies of the Messiah by becoming the suffering servant (Isaiah 53) who would live again (1 Corinthians 15) and will one day return to reign forever.

Philippians 2:10, NIV: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

What does Philippians 2:10 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Part of the result of Jesus being highly exalted (Philippians 2:9) is that all people, ultimately, will be in submission to Him. The idea may actually be better expressed by "will bow," referring to something *certain* to happen. This is phrased in terms including every possible being. Those "in heaven" could include angels and saints who have passed away already. Those "on earth" clearly refer to people living now, or more specifically at the time Paul was writing this letter. Those "under the earth" could include those who have already died and perhaps the Devil and evil spirits who must submit to the power of the Lord (Revelation 20).

This understanding is also enhanced after looking at verse 11, which refers to every "tongue" confessing Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. In

the future, every being will bow before the Lord, the ultimate reward for the Lord Jesus Christ who became the ultimate servant during His time on earth.

Philippians 2:11, NIV: and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father

What does Philippians 2:11 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

This concludes the hymn of verses 6–11. Paul touches on one final aspect of the exaltation of Jesus, with a focus on the glory of God. In addition to every knee bowing before Jesus (Philippians 2:10), all people will, one day, admit that He is God and Messiah. God's preference is that this happens in life, while there is a chance for salvation (2 Peter 3:9), rather than after death, when it is too late (Revelation 20:15).

This inevitable victory will bring glory to God the Father. The glory of God is a common scriptural theme, seen both in the Old Testament (Psalm 19:1; 106:20; Proverbs 25:2) as well as several times in the New Testament. Jesus spoke of God's glory (John 11:4, 40). Stephen saw the glory of God before his death (Acts 7:55). All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). Believers rejoice in the hope of the "glory of God" (Romans 5:2). In fact, believers are to do all things for the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31). Revelation notes the glory of God on three occasions (15:8; 21:11, 23), with the glory of God ultimately giving light to the new heavens and earth.

Matthew chapter 26

New International Version

1 When Jesus had finished saying all these things, he said to his disciples, **2** As you know, the Passover is two days away--and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified.'

3 Then the chief priests and the elders of the people assembled in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, **4** and they schemed to arrest Jesus secretly and kill him. **5** But not during the festival,' they said, 'or there may be a riot among the people.'

6 While Jesus was in Bethany in the home of Simon the Leper, **7** a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, which she poured on his head as he was reclining at the table.

8 When the disciples saw this, they were indignant. 'Why this waste?' they asked.

9 This perfume could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor.'

10 Aware of this, Jesus said to them, 'Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me. **11** The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me. **12** When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial. **13** Truly I tell you, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.'

14 Then one of the Twelve--the one called Judas Iscariot--went to the chief priests **15** and asked, 'What are you willing to give me if I deliver him over to you?' So they counted out for him thirty pieces of silver. **16** From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over.

17 On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the disciples came to Jesus and asked, 'Where do you want us to make preparations for you to eat the Passover?'

18 He replied, 'Go into the city to a certain man and tell him, 'The Teacher says: My appointed time is near. I am going to celebrate the Passover with my disciples at your house.'" **19** So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them and prepared the Passover.

20 When evening came, Jesus was reclining at the table with the Twelve. **21** And while they were eating, he said, 'Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me.'

22 They were very sad and began to say to him one after the other, 'Surely you don't mean me, Lord?'

23 Jesus replied, 'The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. **24** The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born.'

25 Then Judas, the one who would betray him, said, 'Surely you don't mean me, Rabbi?' Jesus answered, 'You have said so.'

26 While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, 'Take and eat; this is my body.'

27 Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you. **28** This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. **29** I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.'

30 When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

31 Then Jesus told them, 'This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written: "I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'

32 But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.'

33 Peter replied, 'Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.'

34 Truly I tell you,' Jesus answered, 'this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.'

35 But Peter declared, 'Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.' And all the other disciples said the same.

36 Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, 'Sit here while I go over there and pray.' **37** He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. **38** Then he said to them, 'My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.'

39 Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, 'My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.'

40 Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. 'Couldn't you men keep watch with me for one hour?' he asked Peter. **41** Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.'

42 He went away a second time and prayed, 'My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.'

43 When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. **44** So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing.

45 Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, 'Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour has come, and the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. **46** Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!'

47 While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived. With him was a large crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests and the elders of the people. **48** Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: 'The one I kiss is the man; arrest him.' **49** Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, 'Greetings, Rabbi!' and kissed him.

50 Jesus replied, 'Do what you came for, friend.' Then the men stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested him. **51** With that, one of Jesus' companions reached for his sword, drew it out and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear.

52 Put your sword back in its place,' Jesus said to him, 'for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. **53** Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? **54** But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?'

55 In that hour Jesus said to the crowd, 'Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? Every day I sat in the temple courts teaching, and you did not arrest me. **56** But this has all taken place that the writings of the prophets might be fulfilled.' Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.

57 Those who had arrested Jesus took him to Caiaphas the high priest, where the teachers of the law and the elders had assembled. **58** But Peter followed him at a distance, right up to the courtyard of the high priest. He entered and sat down with the guards to see the outcome.

59 The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death.

60 But they did not find any, though many false witnesses came forward. Finally two came forward **61** and declared, 'This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days.'"

62 Then the high priest stood up and said to Jesus, 'Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?'

63 But Jesus remained silent. The high priest said to him, 'I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God.'

64 You have said so,' Jesus replied. 'But I say to all of you: From now on you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.'

65 Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, 'He has spoken blasphemy! Why do we need any more witnesses? Look, now you have heard the blasphemy.'

66 What do you think?' 'He is worthy of death,' they answered.

67 Then they spit in his face and struck him with their fists. Others slapped him

68 and said, 'Prophecy to us, Messiah. Who hit you?'

69 Now Peter was sitting out in the courtyard, and a servant girl came to him.

'You also were with Jesus of Galilee,' she said.

70 But he denied it before them all. 'I don't know what you're talking about,' he said.

71 Then he went out to the gateway, where another servant girl saw him and said to the people there, 'This fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth.'

72 He denied it again, with an oath: 'I don't know the man!'

73 After a little while, those standing there went up to Peter and said, 'Surely you are one of them; your accent gives you away.'

74 Then he began to call down curses, and he swore to them, 'I don't know the man!' Immediately a rooster crowed. **75** Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken: 'Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.' And he went outside and wept bitterly.

Matthew chapter 27

New International Version

1 Early in the morning, all the chief priests and the elders of the people made their plans how to have Jesus executed. **2** So they bound him, led him away and handed him over to Pilate the governor.

3 When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders.

4 'I have sinned,' he said, 'for I have betrayed innocent blood.' 'What is that to us?' they replied. 'That's your responsibility.'

5 So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself.

6 The chief priests picked up the coins and said, 'It is against the law to put this into the treasury, since it is blood money.' **7** So they decided to use the money to buy the potter's field as a burial place for foreigners. **8** That is why it has been called the Field of Blood to this day. **9** Then what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: 'They took the thirty pieces of silver, the price set on him by the people of Israel, **10** and they used them to buy the potter's field, as the Lord commanded me.'

11 Meanwhile Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, 'Are you the king of the Jews?' 'You have said so,' Jesus replied.

12 When he was accused by the chief priests and the elders, he gave no answer.

13 Then Pilate asked him, 'Don't you hear the testimony they are bringing against you?' **14** But Jesus made no reply, not even to a single charge--to the great amazement of the governor.

15 Now it was the governor's custom at the festival to release a prisoner chosen by the crowd. **16** At that time they had a well-known prisoner whose name was Jesus Barabbas. **17** So when the crowd had gathered, Pilate asked them, 'Which one do you want me to release to you: Jesus Barabbas, or Jesus who is called the Messiah?' **18** For he knew it was out of self-interest that they had handed Jesus over to him.

19 While Pilate was sitting on the judge's seat, his wife sent him this message: 'Don't have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him.'

20 But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed.

21 'Which of the two do you want me to release to you?' asked the governor. 'Barabbas,' they answered.

22 'What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called the Messiah?' Pilate asked. They all answered, 'Crucify him!'

23 'Why? What crime has he committed?' asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, 'Crucify him!'

24 When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. 'I am innocent of this man's blood,' he said. 'It is your responsibility!'

25 All the people answered, 'His blood is on us and on our children!'

26 Then he released Barabbas to them. But he had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.

27 Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. **28** They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, **29** and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand. Then they knelt in front of him and mocked him. 'Hail, king of the Jews!' they said. **30** They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. **31** After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.

32 As they were going out, they met a man from Cyrene, named Simon, and they forced him to carry the cross. **33** They came to a place called Golgotha (which means 'the place of the skull'). **34** There they offered Jesus wine to drink, mixed

with gall; but after tasting it, he refused to drink it. **35** When they had crucified him, they divided up his clothes by casting lots. **36** And sitting down, they kept watch over him there. **37** Above his head they placed the written charge against him: this is Jesus, the king of the Jews.

38 Two rebels were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. **39** Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads **40** and saying, 'You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!' **41** In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. **42** He saved others,' they said, 'but he can't save himself! He's 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 rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, 'I am the Son of God.'" **44** In the same way the rebels who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

45 From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land. **46** About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, 'Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?' (which means 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?').

47 When some of those standing there heard this, they said, 'He's calling Elijah.'

48 Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. **49** The rest said, 'Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to save him.'

50 And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.

51 At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split **52** and the tombs broke open. The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. **53** They came out of the tombs after Jesus' resurrection and went into the holy city and appeared to many people.

54 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!'

55 Many women were there, watching from a distance. They had followed Jesus from Galilee to care for his needs. **56** Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of Zebedee's sons.

57 As evening approached, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who had himself become a disciple of Jesus. **58** Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus' body, and Pilate ordered that it be given to him. **59** Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, **60** and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock. He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away. **61** Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting there opposite the tomb.

62 The next day, the one after Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate. **63** Sir,' they said, 'we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise again.' **64** So give the order for the tomb to be made Context Summary

65 Take a guard,' Pilate answered. 'Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how.' **66** So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard.

Context Summary

Matthew 26:1–5 shows that Jesus knows exactly what is going to happen to Him in the next few days. He tells the disciples He will be handed over for crucifixion at Passover. Meanwhile, the high priest, chief priests, and elders are plotting to arrest Jesus secretly and have Him killed. They decide to wait until after the Passover feast so as not to provoke the crowds to riot in defense of Jesus.

Matthew 26:1, NIV: When Jesus had finished saying all these things, he said to his disciples,

What does Matthew 26:1 mean? [[↑↑ See verse text ↑↑](#)]

For the fifth time in his book, Matthew concludes a long description of Jesus' teaching with similar words: "When Jesus had finished all these sayings" (Matthew 7:27; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1). Jesus will not teach again before His crucifixion.

The previous two chapters contain what Bible scholars call the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24:3). Jesus, sitting on the Mount of Olives, has described future events, including their own persecution, the destruction of the temple, the return of the Son of Man at an unknown moment, and the judgment to follow His return after a time of tribulation on the earth.

Much of what Jesus has taught must have been baffling to the disciples, especially before Jesus' death, resurrection, and return to heaven. Eventually, it will become clear to them. For now, though, the time of Jesus' teaching has come to an end. The time of His great suffering is about to begin.

Matthew 26:2, NIV: As you know, the Passover is two days away--and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified.'

What does Matthew 26:2 mean? [[↑](#) [See verse text](#) [↑](#)]

Jesus has concluded His significant teaching to the disciples (Matthew 26:1). Following an extended time in the temple teaching about and confronting the Pharisees, Jesus took the disciples to the Mount of Olives (Matthew 24:3) and taught them directly about future events that would follow His death, resurrection, and return to heaven.

Now, though, Jesus returns His focus to the events of the week before Him. For the fourth and final time in Matthew, He tells His disciples directly that the Son of Man, meaning Himself, will be handed over to be crucified. He has been even more specific about what is to come in earlier statements (Matthew 16:21; 17:22–23; 20:17–19).

This is the first time, though, that Jesus connects His crucifixion directly to Passover. God commanded Israel to celebrate the Passover annually as a way of remembering how He saved them and brought them out of Egypt when they were slaves (Exodus 12). God's angel brought death to the houses of the Egyptians, but it passed over the houses of Israelites marked with the blood of a lamb.

The Passover celebration began each year with the killing of a lamb. This year during Passover, Jesus, the Lamb of God, will also be killed. Those covered by the blood of the Lamb will be saved from the wrath of God for human sin.

Jesus says Passover is coming after two days. Scholars debate the exact day of the week on which these events occurred, but the literal day of the week is not especially important for understanding what happens.

Matthew 26:3, NIV: Then the chief priests and the elders of the people assembled in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas,

What does Matthew 26:3 mean? [[↑↑ See verse text ↑↑](#)]

Matthew's change of focus shows that Jesus' declaration in the previous verse—that He would soon be captured and crucified (Matthew 26:1–2)—was not an empty prediction. Elsewhere in Jerusalem, the chief priests and elders of the people have gathered to discuss the very same thing.

The Jewish religious leaders have wanted Jesus gone for quite a while now. Matthew described their eagerness to destroy Jesus back in chapter 12 (Matthew 12:14). Various earlier plots to arrest Jesus stalled out because many of the people clearly respected Him and thought of Him as a prophet of God (Matthew 21:45–56).

Still, Jesus had so thoroughly and publicly condemned and humiliated the religious leaders that they felt the need to do something soon. This gathering at the home of the high priest does not likely include the entire ruling body known as the Sanhedrin. Matthew reveals it does include the chief priests and some of the lay leaders known as the elders, in addition to the high priest himself.

Matthew and John (John 11:49) name the Jewish high priest at this moment as Caiaphas. Luke mentions Annas (Luke 3:2). It is likely that both men were thought of as high priest during this time. Annas, Caiaphas' father-in-law, had been removed from the office by secular authorities in A.D. 15. Israel's law, though, said the high priest's term could only end in death, meaning that many Jewish people may have continued to recognize Annas as the "real" high priest, as well.

Matthew 26:4, NIV: and they schemed to arrest Jesus secretly and kill him.

What does Matthew 26:4 mean? [[↑↑ See verse text ↑↑](#)]

Jesus told His disciples openly that He would be condemned by Israel's religious leaders and handed over to the Romans to be executed (Matthew 16:21–23; Mark 10:33). Matthew shows that this is exactly what the chief priests and elders are plotting to accomplish together. They are gathered at the home of Caiaphas, the high priest. Specifically, they hope to secretly arrest Jesus and kill Him

without inciting the crowds to riot over this treatment of a man many believe to be a prophet of God.

Why this risk? Why are they so eager to eliminate Jesus? The religious leaders have two clear motives to get Jesus out of the way. First, their goal is to maintain the peace in Israel and keep the people from rebelling against Rome and bringing the Empire's wrath down on the tiny country (John 11:48). Not only would this avoid additional bloodshed, it also conveniently keeps the religious leaders in their positions of power and relative comfort.

Secondly, though, Jesus has publicly and thoroughly condemned the scribes and the Pharisees as hypocrites. During this week, He has even depicted their lawful choices as attempts to bring glory only to themselves (Matthew 23:1–7). Jesus' teaching is a direct threat to the credibility of the men gathered at the home of the high priest on this day.

Matthew 26:5, NIV: But not during the festival,' they said, 'or there may be a riot among the people.'

What does Matthew 26:5 mean? [[↑↑ See verse text ↑↑](#)]

The moment is coming when Jesus will be arrested by Israel's religious leaders. He knows this (Mark 10:33; Matthew 16:21–23). He knows He will be tried, condemned, and turned over to the Romans to be crucified. In fact, this is central to His mission on earth as the Son of God.

The high priest of Israel, along with the chief priests and elders, are actively working toward that exact goal now, as well. They want Jesus dead (John 11:53). They hope to accomplish it as lawfully as possible, but they're willing to cut corners. Even meeting to condemn Jesus in this way is a violation of the law (Deuteronomy 17:6; Leviticus 19:15–18).

They know they must be careful, though. Jesus is a popular healer of the sick and demon oppressed. Great crowds of people have followed Him around Israel to hear Him preach and see His miracles. Many people think of Him as a true prophet of God and some have started to believe He could be the Messiah

(Matthew 21:9–11). The religious leaders cannot afford to let Jesus' power and popularity grow, but they also do not want to provoke the people to riot by arresting Jesus during the Passover celebration.

The Passover could be an especially dangerous time in Jerusalem. For one thing, as many as five times as many people crowded into Jerusalem as normal. The crowds brought with them a restless energy. For another thing, they were celebrating God's miraculous and powerful rescue of their people under the oppression of Egypt. Why couldn't God do the same for them again with the Romans? Why couldn't God do it right now? Why couldn't the Savior, the Messiah, be among them to raise up and overthrow the Romans at this very moment?

Israel's religious leaders wanted to avoid riots and uprisings. It would be best to wait for the Passover to end before arresting Jesus. Soon, though, a man named Judas would change their minds about waiting any longer (Matthew 26:14).

Matthew 26:6, NIV: While Jesus was in Bethany in the home of Simon the Leper,

What does Matthew 26:6 mean? [[↑↑ See verse text ↑↑](#)]

Matthew describes an unusual event in Bethany, two miles east of Jerusalem on the Mount of Olives. Jesus had previously stayed in Bethany, at the home of His friends Mary, Martha, and Lazarus (John 11:1). Now, Matthew finds Jesus sharing a meal at the home of a man identified as "Simon the leper," mentioned only here in the New Testament.

Though the text does not mention it, it is very likely Jesus healed this Simon from his leprosy. The law required people with this disease to live apart from others. If he still carried the illness, all those who ate with him would have been officially unclean during the Passover celebration. Further, the fear and stigma associated with diseases like leprosy would have made a gathering in his home impossible. Everyone would have kept their distance if Simon had not been given a clean bill of health.

Context Summary

Matthew 26:6–16 finds Jesus and the disciples in Bethany at the home of a man identified as "Simon the leper." A woman, likely Mary the sister of Lazarus, opens a bottle of extremely expensive ointment and anoints Jesus' head as He reclines at the table during dinner. The disciples think the ointment should have been sold and the money given to the poor, but Jesus insists she has done a beautiful thing that will prepare Him for burial. Judas then offers to turn Jesus over to the chief priests. They pay him 30 silver pieces, a price ironically associated with the cost of a common slave.

Matthew 26:7, NIV: a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, which she poured on his head as he was reclining at the table.

What does Matthew 26:7 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

It's not explicitly stated if this instance of Jesus being anointed with oil while in Bethany is the same event recorded in John 12:1–11. It could be a different event that happened around the same time. However, most Bible scholars believe Matthew's details are part of the same event. This would mean the woman who anoints Jesus' head here is Mary, sister of Martha and Lazarus (John 11:1).

In both descriptions, the act is extravagant. It would not have been uncommon to anoint the head of an honored guest with simple household oil. This woman, though, uses an extremely expensive perfumed ointment to anoint Jesus. Matthew describes an alabaster flask, one which would have likely required the neck of the bottle to be broken so that the oil could be poured out. The woman pours the thick, aromatic oil over Jesus' head as He reclines at the table with the other dinner guests. She does so in full view of all those gathered at Simon's home.

If the events are the same, John describes the oil as a pound of ointment made from pure nard. He shows Mary pouring the oil on Jesus' feet and wiping His feet with her long hair. A pound is a lot of oil. It's not surprising that John says the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume (John 12:3). Everyone would quickly have become aware of Mary's intimate act of anointing Jesus, the one who had raised her dead brother back to life.

Matthew 26:8, NIV: When the disciples saw this, they were indignant. 'Why this waste?' they asked.

What does Matthew 26:8 mean? [[↑](#) [See verse text](#) [↑](#)]

A woman at a dinner party has done an extraordinary and extravagant thing. She has poured a bottle of extremely expensive oil over Jesus' head to anoint Him. John 12:1–11 seems to describe the same moment, making this woman Mary, sister of Martha and Lazarus. The oil was a full pound of nard ointment that she also poured over Jesus' feet and then wiped off with her hair. By any measure, this is an act of enormous honor and respect, as well as an act of great and intimate humility.

How do the disciples reclining at the table with Jesus react to this aromatic devotion from the woman? Matthew tells us they are indignant, not because of the woman's boldness but because of the cost of the oil. "Why this waste?" they say. John, if telling the same story, makes it clear that the primary objection comes from Judas Iscariot, the disciple who will soon betray Jesus (John 12:4–6).

Matthew 26:9, NIV: This perfume could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor.'

What does Matthew 26:9 mean? [[↑](#) [See verse text](#) [↑](#)]

The disciples raise what seems like a practical objection to an extravagant act of devotion. She has poured enormously expensive oil over Jesus' head. If John 12:1–11 tells the same story, this woman is Mary, the sister of Lazarus (John 11:1) and she also poured the oil over Jesus' feet and wiped them off with her hair. The house is now thick with the heavy, perfumed smell of nard ointment.

The disciples are indignant (Matthew 26:8). John's version puts the words only in the mouth of Judas, who will soon betray Jesus. In either case, the objection is

financial. That perfume could have been sold for lots of money, and the money could have been given to the poor.

The clear implication is that the resource had been wasted by the woman in pouring all that oil all over Jesus. How foolish, they thought. In John's version, Judas' motive is more clearly selfish. Judas was responsible for the group moneybag and regularly helped himself to the cash. He was thinking about how much he could have pocketed if they sold that perfume instead of using it up on Jesus (John 12:6).

Matthew 26:10, NIV: Aware of this, Jesus said to them, 'Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me.'

What does Matthew 26:10 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

The disciples have not been impressed by a woman's extravagant act of devotion and worship. She has opened an enormously-expensive bottle of perfumed oil and has poured it all over Jesus' head. If John 12:1–11 tells the same story, the perfume was worth nearly as much as a year's wages and the woman poured it over Jesus' feet, as well.

The disciples condemned the woman for this, at least to each other. Why not sell that expensive bottle of oil and give all the money to the poor? Why seemingly waste it, anointing Jesus in this outrageous way?

Jesus, though, knows what they're thinking and saying to each other. He rebukes them and uses a question to tell them to leave the woman alone. Jesus describes her extravagant act of devotion as a beautiful thing. He will show that in pouring this oil over Him, this woman has begun to prepare Him for the burial that will follow the brutal events of the coming days, something the disciples still don't seem to grasp.

Matthew 26:11, NIV: The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me.

What does Matthew 26:11 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

John 12:1–11 seems to describe this same event. It is clear that Judas is one of the disciples who objected to this anointing of Jesus with expensive oil. His motive was selfish. He wanted some of the money that would have been gained from selling the oil for himself. He was a thief.

Other disciples, though, may have had more noble motives. They were deeply aware of the devastating poverty all around them in Israel. They were also aware of their responsibility to help care for their poor friends and neighbors. Maybe the perfumed oil that now filled their nostrils should have been sold to raise money for the poor and hurting. It's not unthinkable for them to wonder what other good might have been done with such a valuable resource.

In this case, Jesus even corrects those with good motives. His response is not harsh, but it is instructive. He tells them they will always have the poor with them —they will never lack opportunities to help those in need. This woman, though, has not wasted a bottle of expensive oil on just anyone. She has anointed the Messiah, the Son of God, the King, the one who will soon be crucified to pay for the sins of humanity. This is not merely a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, it's a once-in-history chance for this woman to honor God.

Jesus emphasizes that He will not be with them long. To worship the king in this way while the king is briefly present is a beautiful thing, Jesus has said. More than that, Jesus will show that this woman has contributed to what Jesus will experience in the coming week. She has begun to prepare Him for the burial to follow His death.

Matthew 26:12, NIV: When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial.

What does Matthew 26:12 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

The disciples had expressed disapproval for a woman's extravagant act of anointing Jesus with oil (Matthew 26:6–9). "Why this waste?" they asked. The price of the ointment was nearly a year's wages, assuming the description in John 12:1–11 is of the same event. Why not sell the ointment and feed some

hungry people? This is not a completely unreasonable concern; the disciples are aware of the poor around them and Jesus' commands to care for others.

Jesus has corrected them for attempting to rebuke the woman. He calls her act of devotion "beautiful" (Matthew 26:10) thing. It's not that giving to the poor is not important. Instead, Jesus emphasizes that His time with them in person is short. This is the only opportunity she will ever have to make this specific gift.

Now He adds another detail to the meaning behind this bold anointing. Whether this woman, likely Mary (John 11:1), understood it or not, the ointment she poured over Jesus has served to prepare Him for His burial. Anointing the body of someone who has died was an important part of the burial custom of the time. Jesus knew He would soon be crucified, as He had repeatedly told the disciples. More was going on in this anointing than extravagant hospitality. This woman was participating in the preparations for the Messiah's death and burial.

This forms an indirect prophesy of sorts. There will be no time to properly anoint Jesus between His death and burial (Luke 23:52–56). The event Matthew describes here is something of a provision of God, seeing to that detail. After Jesus' burial, several women will bring spices to further anoint His body only to find Him missing (Mark 16:1–5).

Matthew 26:13, NIV: Truly I tell you, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.'

What does Matthew 26:13 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Jesus rejected the disciples' idea that the woman who anointed Him (John 12:1–11) should have sold the ointment instead, to make better use of the money. Rather, He has called her act a beautiful thing (Matthew 26:1–10). More than that, He has said that her act of devotion was preparing His body for burial (Matthew 26:11–12). This will occur within the week, and there will not be time between Jesus' death and His burial for the normal process of anointing (Luke 23:52–56). In fact, Jesus declares that what this woman has done will be forever tied to the story of the gospel!

It's important to note that Jesus does not merely defend Mary (John 11:1) by saying what she has done is merely permissible. He elevates her act of devotion to Him as a moment which will be remembered throughout history as the "good news" of the kingdom of heaven is proclaimed around the world.

Mary's act was bold, extravagant, and to some even seemed inappropriate. It was worship for the Messiah who would die and be buried and then resurrected, and it was entirely right and good. Given the pungent, perfumed aroma of nard in such quantities, it is likely a moment that literally lingered for all who were near to Jesus in the days leading up to His arrest, conviction, and crucifixion.

Matthew 26:14, NIV: Then one of the Twelve--the one called Judas Iscariot--went to the chief priests

What does Matthew 26:14 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Matthew often moves his telling of the events of Jesus' life out of strict chronological order. This is a common tactic in ancient records: linking similar themes or moments together. Here, Matthew connects Judas' decision to betray Jesus with Jesus' defense of the woman who anointed him with extremely expensive ointment.

Assuming John 12:1–11 is describing the same event, it is Judas who asked why the perfume was not sold and the money given to the poor. Jesus insisted that the woman, Mary, was participating in the preparation of His body for burial.

Perhaps that was the breaking moment for Judas. He may have felt stung by Jesus' correction. He may have suspected Jesus knew he had been stealing money from the group's moneybag (John 12:6). Perhaps he recognized that Jesus was really, truly expecting to die and be buried. This would quash any hope for Jesus to be a military or political figure. Misguided hope that Jesus would defy Rome to usher in a new kingdom on earth was fading.

Whatever reasons Judas gave himself, Satan was involved in his decision to offer Jesus to the chief priests. The Devil put the idea in Judas' heart (John 13:2), Judas acted on it, and Satan entered him when the time came to act (John 13:27).

Matthew 26:15, NIV: and asked, 'What are you willing to give me if I deliver him over to you?' So they counted out for him thirty pieces of silver.

What does Matthew 26:15 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Under the influence of Satan (John 13:2, 27), one of Jesus' chosen twelve disciples, Judas Iscariot, has made a traitorous decision. He will betray the Lord to the Jewish religious leaders who want to arrest and kill him (John 13:3–4). Matthew positions this decision following Jesus' correction of the disciples over expensive ointment. They said the woman who anointed Jesus should have sold the oil and given the money to the poor. Jesus insisted she was preparing His body for burial (Matthew 26:1–14).

John 12:6 reveals that Judas was already stealing from the group moneybag at this point. He may have been growing in disillusionment with Jesus' approach to Rome, the Pharisees, and Israel. His decision now to betray Jesus also comes with an apparent financial motive. He asks the chief priests what they will give him to deliver Jesus over to them. They pay Judas 30 pieces of silver.

This was not a large amount of money. It is the amount in the law that was to be paid by the owner of an ox that accidentally gored a slave to death (Exodus 21:32). Zechariah only sarcastically referred to this as a "lordly price" (Zechariah 11:13). It is a shockingly low amount for the betrayal of the Son of God, of course, and it reveals how little value Israel's religious leaders placed on Jesus. It also suggests that Judas' motivations might have been personal, in that he perhaps came to resent Jesus and His mission.

Matthew 26:16, NIV: From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over.

What does Matthew 26:16 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

The chief priests and elders have been plotting together at the home of the high priest about how to arrest and kill Jesus (John 11:53). They had decided to wait

until after the Passover, to avoid causing an uproar among the crowds of people packed into Jerusalem for the celebration. The last thing they wanted were riots over this popular preacher and healer.

Now, a perfect opportunity has come along, causing them to risk moving up their timetable. One of Jesus' inner circle of twelve disciples, Judas Iscariot, has come to them and offered to deliver Jesus over to them. This is a meaningful offer, since the ancient world didn't have the advantages of photographs, cameras, or telephones to track someone like Jesus to a specific location. With Judas' help, they will be able to find and arrest Jesus in the middle of the night, far from the view of the crowds. This is the chance they have been waiting for.

Now it's up to Judas to find the perfect moment to betray his master. He has been paid his 30 pieces of silver. It will be up to him to follow through.

Context Summary

Matthew 26:17–35 begins with locating the room which will be used for the Passover meal. While they are eating, Jesus announces that one of His closest disciples will become a traitor. Judas discovers that Jesus knows it is him. Jesus introduces the concept of bread and wine as symbols of His sacrificial body and blood. After the meal, Jesus tells the disciples they will fall away that night and that Peter will deny Him three times. They insist that will not happen. Mark 14:10–31, Luke 22:3–23, Luke 22:31–34, and John 13:21–38 feature these events, as well.

Matthew 26:17, NIV: On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the disciples came to Jesus and asked, 'Where do you want us to make preparations for you to eat the Passover?'

What does Matthew 26:17 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

At this time in Israel's history, Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were often considered a single, weeklong event. It began on the Jewish date of Nisan 15 and continued through Nisan 21. The disciples need a location which is suitable for the Passover meal, and assume that Jesus will want all of them to be present.

This cannot be a last-minute choice since these preparations were extensive. First, a lamb was taken to the temple to be slaughtered by the priests. Then it was brought to the place of the meal to be cooked with bitter herbs, along with the other dishes. Four glasses of wine would be consumed per guest at designated moments in the meal. All this needed to be made ready for Jesus and the twelve disciples to eat and celebrate together after sundown on Thursday evening.

Jesus will give specific directions to find the place for their Passover meal. This event, detailed in upcoming verses, will become known in history as the Last Supper.

Matthew 26:18, NIV: He replied, 'Go into the city to a certain man and tell him, 'The Teacher says: My appointed time is near. I am going to celebrate the Passover with my disciples at your house.'

What does Matthew 26:18 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

The disciples have asked Jesus where they should go to prepare the Passover meal for all of them to eat together (Matthew 26:17). None of them lived in Jerusalem. They didn't have a natural spot to prepare a meal for at least 13 guests. Also, the law required the meal to be eaten within Jerusalem's walls. The city was packed, and places to eat as a large group would have been scarce. On top of all of that, it was already the crucial day. The meal was to be eaten after sundown, just a few hours away.

Jesus' answer to them is mysterious. He tells them to go into the city, Jerusalem, to a "certain man." Matthew leaves out the details added in Mark: They will be met by a man carrying a jar of water. They are to follow him to whatever house he enters and then talk to the owner of that house (Mark 14:13–14). They are to say to that man that the time is short and that they will keep the Passover at his house. Mark adds that the man will show them to a large, furnished upstairs room (Mark 14:15), that later became known simply as the "upper room," the place of the Last Supper.

Matthew 26:19, NIV: So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them and prepared the Passover.

What does Matthew 26:19 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Jesus has given the disciples directions for finding the place where they will observe the Last Supper. It is not clear whether He had made prior arrangements. He may have been relying on the Spirit to prepare the owner of the house to be ready for Jesus and the disciples to meet there. It may be that there was a level of secrecy involved since Jesus understood the Jewish religious leaders wanted to arrest and kill Him. That would happen later in the evening (Matthew 26:47), but not before He had completed His time with the disciples.

Some Bible scholars speculate that the house with the upper room was owned by the father of John Mark, though there is no hard evidence for this. In any case, the room was provided, and the disciples prepared for the Passover meal in keeping with the Jewish Scriptures. They would eat it together after sundown, as the first day of the Passover week officially began.

Matthew 26:20, NIV: When evening came, Jesus was reclining at the table with the Twelve.

What does Matthew 26:20 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Matthew records the beginning of what has famously become known as the Last Supper. This is Jesus' final meal with His twelve disciples before His arrest, trials, conviction, and crucifixion. Jesus knows exactly what is coming later in the evening. Though He has warned them repeatedly about it (Matthew 16:21–23), the disciples seem unaware of what will happen over the next few days. They likely know that Jesus is wanted by the Jewish religious leaders (John 11:57). They may be nervous about being in Jerusalem for the Passover, as required by the law.

They would have waited until sundown to eat the Passover meal together. In Jewish timekeeping, sundown was the beginning of the day to follow. The Passover began on 15th of the month known as Nisan.

It was not common in this culture to sit on chairs around a table to eat a meal. Instead, formal meals were served in the Middle Eastern style. Participants would sit on cushions in a U-shaped pattern around a low table and lean back as they ate a long and leisurely meal. Together with His twelve handpicked disciples, Jesus reclined and ate, leading the group through the prescribed steps required in the law for each stage of the Passover meal.

Matthew 26:21, NIV: And while they were eating, he said, 'Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me.'

What does Matthew 26:21 mean? [[↑](#) [See verse text](#) [↑](#)]

Jesus and His twelve disciples are gathered in the upper room of a house (Matthew 26:17–19). They are all reclining around a low table while sitting on cushions and eating the Passover meal together (Matthew 26:20). At some point during the meal, Jesus makes an announcement that changes the course of the discussion for the rest of the dinner. Jesus declares with absolute certainty that one of these close companions will become a traitor.

Matthew has already revealed that Judas Iscariot has agreed to turn Jesus over to the chief priests for 30 pieces of silver (Matthew 26:14–16). Matthew has not described Judas' other motives. We know from John that Judas has already been stealing from the group moneybag (John 12:6). These perspectives are all hindsight: at the time of this meal, Jesus is the only one who knows which person is false. It will not be until later that Matthew, John, and the rest learn the tragic details.

While Jesus is aware, the rest of the company has no idea that Judas is the betrayer. They are accustomed to hearing difficult pronouncements from Jesus. In fact, they each express fear that they will be the one to fall, despite having no plan to wrong Jesus in any way (Matthew 26:22).

Matthew 26:22, NIV: They were very sad and began to say to him one after the other, 'Surely you don't mean me, Lord?'

What does Matthew 26:22 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Strangely, each of the disciples asks Jesus if he is the one who will betray the Lord (Matthew 26:20–21). This comes after Jesus predicting that one of them is a traitor. On one hand, this is an extraordinary moment of humility and perspective. None of them, other than Judas (Matthew 26:14–16), have had any ill intent towards Christ at this point. Yet they all worry that Jesus' dire prophecy might apply to them. They're used to Jesus giving them difficult teachings, and they realize the possibility of falling into sin. This makes them understandably sad, thinking they could hurt their Master. In this moment, only Jesus and Judas know that Judas has taken money in exchange for an agreement to turn the Lord over to the chief priests (Mark 14:10).

Another possibility is that these questions are rhetorical: statements of innocence, rather than actual questions. In English, a common response to an accusation is "who, me?" The disciples might be saying something like "you don't think I would do that, would you?" The sorrow they express might be sadness that Jesus would even suspect such a thing. Later, Peter and others will insist their willingness to die before abandoning Christ (John 13:36–38). They will be wrong about that, though only Judas will be guilty of directly betraying Jesus to His enemies.

In an interesting detail, Judas will refer to Jesus as a teacher, rather than a master, when he speaks (Matthew 26:25). Whether Judas asks the exact same question as the others, before then, is not explicitly stated.

Matthew 26:23, NIV: Jesus replied, 'The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me.'

What does Matthew 26:23 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

While eating the Passover meal with His disciples, Jesus has announced that one of them will betray Him (Matthew 26:20–21). Matthew's readers know Judas has already pocketed money for turning Jesus over to the chief priests (Matthew 26:14–16). The other 11 disciples will learn many of these details after the fact (John 12:6), but do not know the information at this time. In sorrow and fear, they each ask Jesus if they will be the betrayer (Matthew 26:22).

Jesus' answer is both cryptic and heartbreaking. It was common to dip a piece of bread or a piece of meat inside bread into a bowl containing a mix of fruit, nuts, and vinegar. This would have helped to cut the bitterness of the "bitter herbs." Sharing a common bowl in this way was a picture of hospitality and fellowship. In saying this, Jesus made the point that the one who will betray Him had shared closeness and intimacy: one who should have been a true friend.

In truth, this is a non-answer, since every one of them at some point dipped their hand into the same dish Jesus has used. John specifies that Jesus handed a piece of bread directly to Judas (John 13:26), a detail likely missed in the instant it happened and only understood once the disciples recounted their memories to one another.

Matthew 26:24, NIV: The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born.'

What does Matthew 26:24 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Jesus has announced to the Twelve that one of them will betray Him (Matthew 26:20–23). Referring to Himself as the Son of Man, Jesus again notes that what happens to Him is part of prophecy. What comes in the following hours is what He has been expecting (Matthew 16:21–23). It is the reason He has come to earth. He is ready for it. Ultimately, that fate leads to resurrection and glory (John 17:1–5).

It is a much different outcome, though, for the one who is betraying Christ. Jesus declares "woe" or judgment for that man. He adds that it would have been better

for that man if he had never been born. Only Jesus knows that He is speaking of Judas (Matthew 26:14–17), one of the twelve men who has travelled with Him for much of the previous three years. Judas will suffer greatly for his betrayal.

This statement raises many important issues. Judas will suffer because He is not a true believer in Christ, despite his earlier actions (Matthew 7:21–23). Judas will not lose prior salvation (John 10:28), he will prove by his actions that he never had it (John 14:15). The idea that Judas would have been "better off" unborn also hints at the reality of an eternal hell (Mark 9:48). If Judas' fate is *worse* than never existing, it implies something other than nonexistence (Matthew 25:41, 46).

Matthew 26:25, NIV: Then Judas, the one who would betray him, said, 'Surely you don't mean me, Rabbi?' Jesus answered, 'You have said so.'

What does Matthew 26:25 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

While the other disciples are clueless as to his treachery, Judas knows he is the betrayer Jesus had spoken of (Matthew 26:20–23). The rest of the disciples immediately asked Jesus if they were the guilty one, but He has only said that it would have been better for the betrayer if he had never been born, pronouncing a judgment of "woe" on the man (Matthew 26:24).

Now Judas finally asks what the others have already asked, with a difference. The others had called Jesus "Lord." Scripture does not say, explicitly, that everyone but Judas had asked that exact question. It's possible that Judas did, continuing to pretend that he was not already guilty (Matthew 26:14–17). Here, however, he responds to Jesus' damnation of the traitor by asking, but not acknowledging Jesus as "Master." Rather, he only calls Him a "teacher," which is not wrong at all (Mark 9:5; John 1:49), but strongly contrasts with the other disciples.

This begs the question of why Judas asked, at all? Perhaps he was trying to cover his guilt by joining in with the others. Perhaps he wanted to see if Jesus already knew he was the guilty one. Or, if Judas had already made his defense (Matthew 26:22), this might be a sarcastic or resigned statement of someone who knows he's caught. In either case, Jesus acknowledges that He knows the truth.

John adds details to the story. Jesus gives a morsel of bread to Judas after dipping it in the bowl that He has mentioned. At that moment, Satan enters fully into Judas (John 13:27). Jesus tells him to do what he is going to do quickly. Judas immediately leaves. The other disciples think Jesus has sent him on an errand, not realizing Judas is the betrayer (John 13:28–30). In the rush of these events happening, such details would have been easily missed until the disciples talked about them later in the week

Matthew 26:26, NIV: While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, 'Take and eat; this is my body.'

What does Matthew 26:26 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Matthew is describing what eventually became known as the Last Supper. This is the final time Christ and the disciples were all together for a meal before His arrest and crucifixion. This was the Passover meal (Matthew 26:17–19), which the law required Israelites to eat together according to a specific set of guidelines. While eating together, Jesus has already said something shocking: One of you will betray me (Matthew 26:21). The guilty party is Judas (Matthew 26:24–25), but none of the other men know this, yet.

Now Matthew records more surprising words from Jesus, introducing a sacrament in which Christians still participate today.

In the middle of the meal, Jesus picks up a loaf or cake of bread. He blesses it: He gives thanks to God the Father for the bread. This might have been the customary prayer of thanks for bread among the Jewish people. Next, Jesus breaks the bread, also according to the custom of the day. He distributes it to the disciples, perhaps one by one or perhaps passing it around the low table. Jesus then gives a command to eat, noting that the bread is His body.

The disciples likely had no idea what Jesus meant by this statement. It would only become clear after His death and resurrection. When taken together with the command in the following verse to drink the wine, as His blood, the concept of remembrance will become clearer (Luke 22:19).

Matthew 26:27, NIV: Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you.

What does Matthew 26:27 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Jesus is once more saying surprising and difficult things to the disciples. He has just broken a loaf of bread and given each of them the pieces, telling them to eat while referring to the bread as His body.

Now Jesus takes a cup of wine. He gives thanks to God the Father for the blessing of the wine, perhaps using the customary prayer of thanks to the "Creator of the fruit of the vine." He distributes the wine to each of the disciples.

Jesus was using this moment in the Passover meal to introduce something new to the disciples and, through them, to the church that would soon be born. The requirements for the Passover meal included drinking four cups of wine. This was likely the time for the "cup of blessing." Jesus associates that cup, representing God's gift to Israel, with His own blood. He commands the disciples to drink it, with that specific command in mind.

In the following verse, Jesus describes what that cup of wine will now represent (Matthew 26:28; Luke 22:19).

Matthew 26:28, NIV: This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

What does Matthew 26:28 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

The Passover meal was observed by nearly every Jewish person as a way of remembering and celebrating God's rescue of Israel through the blood of the lamb on their doorposts (Exodus 12:7, 14). Now Jesus is using the elements of the Passover meal to introduce something new.

He has broken bread and distributed it to them, describing it as His body (Matthew 26:26). He has given them the third cup of wine included in the meal, the "cup of blessing," and commanded them to drink it. He now describes that cup of wine as "my blood of the covenant."

Jesus' words have a connection to a powerful moment between God and the people of Israel during the time of Moses (Exodus 24:1–8). The blood of animal sacrifices was used to seal an agreement between God and the people. God promised to take care of them, and the people promised to be obedient to all God told them. Then came this:

"Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, 'Behold the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words'" (Exodus 24:8).

The disciples, then, would have grown up knowing that a covenant between God and His people was sealed with the blood of a sacrifice. Now Jesus has described the wine they are drinking as His blood of the covenant. He says that it is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

Jesus is describing a new agreement—a formal promise—between God and many people. This time, though, the covenant will not be for Israel alone. It will be for all people who come to God through faith in Jesus. Jesus' blood will be poured out to pay the price for the sin of all who trust in Him. His blood will seal the agreement God is making to forgive the sins of these Christ-followers or "Christians," taking Jesus' death as the payment for their sin.

The moment is very close now when Jesus' body will be abused, and His blood poured out on the cross. That is the moment Jesus' followers will remember with humble gratitude when they break the bread and drink from the cup together (Luke 22:19). It will come to be known as communion or the Lord's Supper.

Paul will describe it this way in 1 Corinthians 11:26, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."

Matthew 26:29, NIV: I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.'

What does Matthew 26:29 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

During this Passover meal with His disciples (Matthew 26:17–19), Jesus has given them something new to practice after His death and resurrection (Luke 22:19). Today this is called the Lord's Supper or communion. He has commanded them to eat bread He has broken and to drink from a cup He has poured out. He called the bread His body and the cup of wine His blood. He said the blood is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins (Matthew 26:26–28). That sacrificial death will happen very soon after He gives these commands, when Jesus is killed on the cross (Matthew 27:35–36).

The practice of communion by Christians since that day is not only about remembering Christ's sacrifice. Nor is it merely about gratitude for His blood poured out for the forgiveness of our sins. Jesus was clear that this practice of communion is also about looking forward. Jesus indicates that He will not drink again until He is with the disciples in His Father's kingdom. Jesus is referring to the banquet, or great feast, that will begin His Father's kingdom on earth. This is the kingdom Jesus has been preaching about since beginning His ministry (Matthew 6:33). It is the time to come when all things will be made right, and He will reign as king forever.

Four cups of wine were included in the Passover meal, each representing a promise from God to Israel. These guarantees are summarized in Exodus 6:6–7: relief from the burdens of Egypt, rescue from slavery, redemption, and becoming the people of God.

Some Bible scholars suggest Jesus introduced the third cup, the cup of blessing or redemption, as His blood of a new covenant between God and the people of Jesus. This would imply that Jesus abstained from the fourth cup in the Passover meal, promising not to drink wine again until the coming of the kingdom when He will be reunited with His people forever.

Matthew 26:30, NIV: When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

What does Matthew 26:30 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

The Passover meal always ended with the singing of the last part of what was called the *Hallel*, from Psalm 113–118 or perhaps Psalm 136. "Hallel" refers to the repeated word "hallelujah." As the acting head of the household, in this moment, Jesus, would have sung one line after another as the disciples responded by singing the word "hallelujah."

The Israelites had sung these promises from God, year after year, for centuries. Now the disciples were singing them together with the Lord Himself, one last time, before the great act of love which would bring so many of these promises into reality: "Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!" (Psalm 118:29).

After concluding the meal with the hymn, the group got up from the table and walked back to their nighttime campsite at the Mount of Olives (Matthew 24:3). Judas had already gone (John 13:26–30). It was just Jesus and the 11 remaining disciples. They will end up at a place called the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36).

Matthew 26:31, NIV: Then Jesus told them, 'This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written: "I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'

What does Matthew 26:31 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

The Passover meal has ended (Matthew 26:17–29). Jesus and 11 of His disciples (John 13:29–30) are walking in the night toward the Mount of Olives. Jesus has told them several difficult things during the evening. He has said that one of them would betray Him, causing each man to doubt his own loyalty. Now Jesus says that all of them will fall away because of Him this night.

Jesus is describing something different from betrayal, though the disciples might not yet understand that. Jesus knew Judas was the one who would act as an active traitor (Matthew 26:14–16), turning Jesus over to be killed (John 11:57). The rest of the twelve would not *betray* Him, but Jesus declares that they will "fall away." They will leave Him alone and run to save themselves (Matthew 26:56).

Christ adds that this event will be a fulfillment of written prophecy; it is part of God's sovereign plan for what is about to happen. He quotes from Zechariah 13:7 to make the point, noting how the flock of sheep will scatter when the shepherd is struck.

The connection between this moment and what is happening in the context of Zechariah 13 is complicated. Jesus' primary point is that He is the shepherd. His sheep—the disciples and His other followers—will scatter this night when He is "struck" by God the Father through what is about to happen.

Matthew 26:32, NIV: But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.'

What does Matthew 26:32 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Jesus has told His disciples a devastating thing. They have just shared the Passover meal together (Matthew 26:17–29). Now, walking in the open night air toward the Mount of Olives (Matthew 26:30), Jesus said they would all fall away because of Him (Matthew 26:31). The idea of "falling away" would suggest they will be faithless to Him. Their courage will fail, and they will run and hide to save themselves. This is not the active treason of Judas, who is acting to deliberately harm Jesus (Matthew 26:14–16).

Thankfully, Jesus doesn't leave His prediction there. He predicts their fearful response but also assures them that this falling away on their part is temporary. He says that after He is raised up, He will go ahead of them back to Galilee.

It would have been difficult for the disciples to comprehend what this might mean. Jesus, though, knows exactly what is about to happen. He will be "struck," and they will scatter (Matthew 26:56). He will be raised from the dead (Matthew 28:5–6). Then He will meet them again back up north, away from Jerusalem, in their home region of Galilee (Matthew 28:10).

Matthew 26:33, NIV: Peter replied, 'Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.'

What does Matthew 26:33 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Peter, as pictured in the Gospels, is ever brash and often wrong. That fearlessness, though, makes him a natural leader for the rest of the disciples. He often boldly says what they are all feeling. Earlier, Peter heard Jesus predict that one of the group would become a traitor (Matthew 26:21). He's taken in the more recent prediction that *all* the disciples would "fall away" that very night (Matthew 26:31). Jesus has not condemned them, rather promising they will be reunited after He is resurrected (Matthew 26:32). Peter, though, hears only the prediction of failure and disloyalty and cowardice on their part. He refuses to believe it.

This leads to a heartfelt, but foolish declaration from Peter: *even if everyone else fails you, I never will!* That probably sounded insulting to the other disciples. And yet, Jesus knows Peter's confidence in his own strength will not be enough in the coming hours (Matthew 26:56; 69–75). Peter will learn, eventually, that Jesus does not want followers who are strong in themselves but who rely on Him.

Matthew 26:34, NIV: Truly I tell you,' Jesus answered, 'this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.'

What does Matthew 26:34 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

In keeping with his impulsive nature, Peter has rejected Jesus' prediction that all the disciples will fall away. He has declared that even if everyone else runs away and hides, he will never do so (Matthew 26:30–33). That's not only derisive to the other disciples, it's also incredibly bold.

Jesus knows, though, that Peter's courage cannot stand the test that is coming. He tells Peter that the bold disciple will not just fall away to save himself (Matthew 26:56), he will in fact deny Jesus three times during the night before the rooster crows to signal the start of a new day (Matthew 26:69–75).

This would have been devastating for Peter to hear, especially coming directly from Jesus. The traitorous actions of Judas would be the worst of all: to actively work to harm his master (Matthew 26:21–22). On the other extreme, to "fall

away" implies running and hiding when Jesus was in danger. To "deny" his relationship to Christ suggested a level of cowardice and unfaithfulness Peter simply could not imagine of himself. He had never known Jesus to be wrong, but Peter would not accept this statement (Matthew 26:35; 69–75).

Peter will learn, eventually, that Jesus does not want followers who think they are strong in themselves. He wants those who know they are strong in Him.

Matthew 26:35, NIV: But Peter declared, 'Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.' And all the other disciples said the same.

What does Matthew 26:35 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Peter is flatly contradicting the words of Jesus. This is remarkable, in that Peter was one of the first to declare Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the Living God (Matthew 16:16). He has been the boldest of all the disciples. He was the one who asked Jesus if He could walk on the water with Him (Matthew 14:28). Peter, though, also became afraid and began to sink (Matthew 14:30). Jesus has said that all the disciples will fall away in fear (Matthew 26:31), something Peter entirely denied.

Then, in a moment that must have been heartbreaking for Peter, Jesus added that not only will Peter fall away, but he will deny Jesus three times (Matthew 26:34). In short, Peter's great faith in his own courage will be revealed to be untrustworthy (Matthew 26:69–75). Faced with immediate danger or death, this very night, Peter will succumb to fear.

Peter still refuses to believe this is possible. He insists that even if it means dying with Jesus, he will never deny Him. Peter demonstrates once more that he is a leader, for good or bad. All the other disciples parrot his claims. They will all soon prove to be wrong (Matthew 26:56). Jesus does not want their self-confidence. They will eventually learn to keep their confidence in Him.

Context Summary

Matthew 26:36–46 follows Jesus and the disciples into a place called Gethsemane, on the Mount of Olives. He takes Peter, James, and John aside

from the main group, then prays to God the Father in indescribably intense anguish. He prays a sincere wish that what's about to happen would not be necessary, but entirely submits to the will of God the Father. The disciples cannot stay awake, despite being roused more than once by Christ. Jesus prays three times, before pointing out Judas, the betrayer, who is coming with a crowd to arrest Him. These events are also depicted in Mark 14:32–42 and Luke 22:39–46.

Matthew 26:36, NIV: Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, 'Sit here while I go over there and pray.'

What does Matthew 26:36 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Jesus and His remaining 11 disciples (John 13:29–30) have been walking from the place where they ate the Passover meal (Matthew 26:17–19) toward the Mount of Olives. Now they come to a place called Gethsemane on the mountain's western side. John describes it as a garden near a brook called Kidron and a place the group often went together (John 18:1–2). They are still inside the boundaries of Jerusalem, as the Passover rules required. It may now be as late as 10 or 11 p.m.

The name *Gethsemane* literally means "oil press," suggesting that the spot was among the olive groves on the mountain. This title is ironic, at least, in that Jesus will experience intense spiritual pressure as He prays there (Mark 14:34; Luke 22:44).

Jesus tells eight of the disciples to sit down while He goes over to another area to pray. The following verse (Matthew 26:37) shows that He takes Peter, James, and John with Him farther into the garden. He may have wanted them to protect His solitude and privacy while He prayed.

Matthew 26:37, NIV: He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled.

What does Matthew 26:37 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Having left the main part of the city, after a Passover meal (Matthew 26:17–19), Jesus and the disciples arrive at a spot they have come to several times before. It is a garden at a place called Gethsemane on the western side of the Mount of Olives. It is late in the evening, perhaps 10 or 11 p.m. Jesus intends to spend some time in the garden praying by Himself away from the group. He has asked eight of the disciples to sit and wait for Him (Matthew 26:36).

Now He takes Peter and the two sons of Zebedee farther in with Him. James and John are these other men. Together with Peter, these three are often called Jesus' inner circle: His closest disciples. These are the three He took to the top of the mountain to see Him transfigured into His glorious appearance (Matthew 17:1–2).

Jesus has apparently remained composed throughout the evening, all the while knowing that the time of His betrayal, arrest, and suffering was about to begin (Matthew 16:21). Now, though, Jesus begins to become sorrowful and troubled. He will tell these three He is sad to the point of death (Matthew 26:38). Other Gospels indicate the unimaginable agony of these emotions (Mark 14:34; Luke 22:44).

This sudden, overt reference to His own feelings is even weightier, in that Christ is so rarely described in the Gospels by what He is *feeling*. He has spoken of the events about to take place very directly and in terms of the fulfillment of prophecy. Never, however, did those depictions make mention of how He *felt* about it. He has shown He is willing. Now He shows how difficult this is for Him. As One who is fully human, anticipation of these experiences is its own form of torture.

Matthew 26:38, NIV: Then he said to them, 'My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.'

What does Matthew 26:38 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Jesus knows that very soon Judas will arrive with the chief priests and elders to arrest Him (Matthew 26:46–47). He has led the disciples to a favorite spot at

Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives (Matthew 26:36). He left eight of them sitting a distance away and continued into the garden with his inner circle of Peter, James, and John (Matthew 26:37).

Now Jesus does something unique in His depiction in the Gospels. He confesses a deeply troubled state of mind. Jesus describes this as being so distressed that He almost feels the emotion would kill Him. Other Gospels explain the strain of this moment in similar ways (Mark 14:34). The three men He has brought into this private area are there, it seems, to provide Jesus with company.

Jesus' language describing His distress resembles some of what David wrote in the Psalms. For instance, David wrote in Psalm 143:3–4, "For the enemy has pursued my soul; he has crushed my life to the ground; he has made me sit in darkness like those long dead. Therefore my spirit faints within me; my heart within me is appalled."

Christians are sometimes tempted to think that feelings of sadness are a kind of failure. Many who have walked closely with God, however, have also experienced deep feelings of sorrow and emotional agony. This is part of the human experience, and Jesus is fully human (Hebrews 4:15). He knows what it is like to feel that way and was able to say so to His most trusted friends.

Some interpreters see Jesus' remark here as more literal than emotional. Luke, the physician, refers to Jesus' sweat as resembling bloody drips (Luke 22:44). This has led to speculation that Jesus was hemorrhaging blood from the skin. The more likely situation is that Jesus was profusely sweating. Christ was certainly enduring emotional trauma. Luke also reports that an angel from heaven appeared to strengthen Jesus (Luke 22:43). His mortal, human body needed help to endure the anticipation of what was to come.

Matthew 26:39, NIV: Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, 'My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.'

What does Matthew 26:39 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Bible commentators have debated, downplayed, exaggerated, and otherwise argued over the meaning of Jesus' words in this prayer. After asking Peter, James, and John to watch with Him, Jesus moves a bit away from them and falls on His face (Matthew 26:36–38). This posture is used throughout the Bible, and history, by those taking the most humble and submissive position possible. In prayer, before God, this reflects a person making a request of great urgency. Jesus is also clearly exhausted in this moment. Other Gospels note the incredible stress He is experiencing (Mark 14:34; Luke 22:44).

The word cup is often used in Scripture to describe God's judgment or a time of great suffering. Jesus Himself asked James and John if they could "drink the cup" assigned to Him, meaning the suffering that He would soon endure (Matthew 20:22). Jesus knew He would soon experience God's judgment for the sins of humanity on the cross. He also knew He was nearing some strain, beyond human comprehension, of His communion with the Father (Matthew 27:46), for the first time in His eternal life.

As One fully human (Hebrews 4:15), Jesus seems overwhelmed and saddened to the point of death by this anticipation. He appears to pray, face to the ground, that God the Father would keep this from happening, if possible. Taken entirely out of context, this could raise questions about Christ's role in His own sacrifice. In some sense, Jesus does not "want" to experience these things. No human being "wants" to suffer humiliation, torture, and death. That's the point of His prayer: He is asking that "if" there is a possible way to avoid it, that He might avoid it.

Critically, though, Jesus immediately binds His request to submission. In virtually the same breath as He makes His appeal, He resolves to obey the will of the Father. Even more powerful than the anguish of His human emotions is Jesus' absolute commitment to obeying God. There is never a question as to whether Christ will follow through on His mission. This prayer is a cry to God, declaring both natural emotions *and* perfect faithfulness (Philippians 2:8).

This attitude when making requests to God is the perfect model for Christians, in all possible situations. It is good to ask the Father for exactly what we want; we are told to do this when we pray (Philippians 4:6; James 4:2). However, a

Christlike prayer not only asks for something, but also commits to obeying God's will, even if the answer should be "no."

Matthew 26:40, NIV: Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. 'Couldn't you men keep watch with me for one hour?' he asked Peter.

What does Matthew 26:40 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Jesus is overwhelmed by sorrow at the anticipation of what is about to happen to Him. The Gospels depict His anguish beyond human comprehension (Matthew 26:36–38; Mark 14:34; Luke 22:44). Christ will not merely be mocked, beaten, tortured, and killed on a cross in great humiliation. He will bear the wrath of God the Father for the sins of humanity (1 Peter 2:24). He will experience some unfathomable, inexplicable strain in His relationship to the Father during that time (Matthew 27:46).

In this state of mind, He has prayed something shocking in both its honesty and humility. He has expressed His desire that, if possible, that these things would not happen. That's an entirely human, natural response, and means nothing more than that Jesus does not "want" to suffer such horrible things. In almost the same breath, however, Christ declares His absolute commitment to follow the Father's will and not His own (Matthew 26:39).

Now He returns to His three most trusted disciples. He has asked them to watch with Him while He prays. Perhaps He meant for them to watch in the sense of keeping a lookout to protect His privacy and solitude. Perhaps He meant for them to join Him in praying, even at a distance. Or, He might simply have wanted the comfort of their presence.

Instead, Jesus finds all three sleeping. It is very late at night by this point, and the disciples are also likely greatly troubled by the things Jesus has said to them. Luke writes that Jesus found them "sleeping for sorrow" (Luke 22:45). They've also come from the Passover meal and the four cups of wine. None of those serve as an adequate excuse, however. Jesus wakes them and asks, pointedly, if they could not have stayed awake for one hour to watch with Him.

He will ask them to watch and pray once more.

Matthew 26:41, NIV: Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.'

What does Matthew 26:41 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Falling on His face in prayer, in a dark olive grove, Jesus is in literal agony, full of sorrow and sweating profusely (Matthew 26:38; Mark 14:34; Luke 22:44). He has prayed to His Father that, if possible, the cup of God's judgment could pass from Him (Matthew 26:39), though He has made it clear that He will submit to the Father's will. He has returned to find His three most trusted disciples sleeping instead of "watching" with Him (Matthew 26:40).

Now Jesus urges them to watch and pray. He wants them to ask that they not fall prey to temptation. Jesus may be talking about the temptation to sleep or He might mean the temptation that will soon arrive to abandon Jesus because of danger. Jesus acknowledges that their spirit is willing to do what is right and honorable, but their flesh—their desires, appetites, urges—is weak (Romans 7:22–25). To *be tempted* is no sin (Hebrews 4:15), but when we fall to temptation, it is our fault alone (1Corinthians 10:13).

Jesus' words provide a clear instruction for one way to battle temptation to do wrong: Prayer. Prayer is a God-given weapon against our own sinful desires. God means for believers to overcome temptation, in part, through urgent and faithful prayer (James 5:16).

Matthew 26:42, NIV: He went away a second time and prayed, 'My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.'

What does Matthew 26:42 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Most of the disciples are sitting together some distance away from Jesus (Matthew 26:36). He has brought Peter, James, and John deeper into the garden

at Gethsemane and has asked them to watch with Him (Matthew 26:37). Now for the second time, He has left them to walk about a stone's throw away (Luke 22:40) and pray in agony to God the Father (Matthew 26:38–39; Mark 14:34; Luke 22:44).

Jesus again emphasizes that He wants His Father's will to be done. His natural, human emotions are agonized over what He knows is coming (Hebrews 4:15). The reference to drinking connects to Jesus' previous prayer in verse 39, where He describes the coming judgment of and separation from God as a "cup." He knows the time has come to endure these things, and He is declaring His desire—His preference—not to do so to God the Father. He will trust His Father's decision.

Jesus, of course, has understood for a long time that His destiny was to die on the cross for the sins of humanity, to be raised back to life in a demonstration of the power of God. He has repeatedly told the disciples that His arrest, conviction, and execution were near (Matthew 16:21). It is likely this awareness of what will soon take place that drives Him to ask the Father whether it is possible to have it pass on from Him. He only makes the request, though, with the understanding that He will do absolutely anything the Father directs. God's will is primary, above and beyond His request.

Matthew 26:43, NIV: When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy.

What does Matthew 26:43 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

For the second time, Jesus has moved away from Peter, James, and John after asking them to watch with Him and to pray. For the second time, He has returned to find them sleeping (Matthew 26:37–42).

The verse points out that these men are extremely tired. Given that it's late at night and dark and following a big supper with wine, it is not surprising their eyes are heavy. Jesus has expressed, as well, that He knows their spirits are willing, but their flesh is weak (Romans 7:22–25). Still, after waking them the first time, He wondered that they could not pull it together enough to watch with Him for an hour.

This time, we're not told that Jesus even bothers to wake them up. Instead, He returns to the same spot in the garden to pray for a third time.

Matthew 26:44, NIV: So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing.

What does Matthew 26:44 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Jesus is in emotional turmoil. He is in agony almost beyond comprehension (Matthew 26:37–38; Mark 14:34; Luke 22:44) at the prospect of the suffering He will experience in the coming hours (Matthew 16:21). He knows God's judgment for humanity's sinfulness will be poured out on Him. He knows, also, that He will experience some strain, beyond human comprehension, in His relationship with God the Father (Matthew 26:46) during this time.

Christ's response to these unimaginable stresses is a model for all saved believers. After expressing what He is feeling to His closest disciples, Jesus moves off by Himself to pray. When He prays, He lays face down on the ground in a position of absolute humility and respect.

His prayer is specific. He tells God the Father what He wants: for this suffering to pass by Him, if possible. In the exact same moment, however, He also submits to the will of God the Father, declaring His willingness to experience whatever God wills (Matthew 26:39–40). It's noteworthy that Jesus does not make this prayer once. He prays in this same way three times in a row. He repeats what He has already prayed.

This is not because God doesn't know the desires or the heart of His own Son. Jesus repeats this act because giving our requests to God is a way of sharing the mental and emotional burden with Him. Paul commands this exact process for anxious believers (Philippians 4:4–7).

We are not Jesus, of course, and there is a mystery here. The Son of God is making a request of God the Father to avoid the cup He has come to earth to drink. He is also submitting, willingly and obediently, to whatever the Father chooses. What is the relationship, exactly, between these two who are also one?

It may be beyond our human capacity to understand on this side of eternity. What we do know is that Jesus, as One fully human (Hebrews 4:15), is expressing His very human emotions in a perfectly sinless way.

Matthew 26:45, NIV: Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, 'Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour has come, and the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners.

What does Matthew 26:45 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Jesus' previous prayers (Matthew 26:36–44) came in moments of intense personal anguish (Mark 14:34; Luke 22:44). Now, so far as Matthew's description seems, He is calm and collected. After praying three times, He seems to have eliminated stresses from His mind, regarding what has been planned for Him (Matthew 16:21). The time has come, and He will not resist it. This is what the Father wants from Him.

Now Jesus returns to Peter, James, and John, still sleeping, and He wakes them one last time. He tells them to sleep later. The time for praying and waiting is over. He, the Son of Man, is betrayed into the hands of sinners. These sinners include Judas, the chief priests, and the elders. Jesus tells His disciples to "see," pointing to the mob coming to arrest Him (Matthew 26:47).

Matthew 26:46, NIV: Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!

What does Matthew 26:46 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

As He wakes Peter, James, and John from their naps, Jesus seems composed and resolved. He had asked them to watch and pray. They could not stay awake. Jesus has told them to sleep later. The betrayal is happening right now. Now He adds that it is time for them to go because His betrayer is at hand (Matthew 26:36–45).

The betrayer, of course, is Judas, one of the twelve disciples who has followed Jesus for the previous three years. Judas approaches through the dark, leading a

group of Roman soldiers, Jewish temple officers, and others. They are carrying clubs and swords and torches, casting shadows around the olive orchard. It is late, perhaps midnight by this time.

Jesus knows exactly why they have come and what they will do with Him after arresting them (Matthew 16:21). This time, though, He will not disappear into the night or miraculously evade them (John 7:30, 44; 10:39). The moment has come (Mark 14:41).

Matthew 26:47, NIV: While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived. With him was a large crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests and the elders of the people.

What does Matthew 26:47 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Jesus' time of prayer in the garden is over (Matthew 26:36–40). It is late and likely quite dark on the Mount of Olives in the garden at Gethsemane. Jesus has awakened His three closest disciples, pointing down the path toward an approaching mob led by his betrayer (Matthew 26:45–46).

Matthew refers to the traitor, Judas Iscariot, as "one of the twelve" to show the depth of his betrayal. Matthew had traveled and served alongside Judas for three years as part of Jesus' dozen handpicked disciples (Matthew 10:1–4). Judas had carried the moneybag for the group (John 12:6). Like the rest, he was a trusted member of this brotherhood of Jesus-followers.

Now, though, Judas arrives with a crowd carrying torches and lanterns (John 18:3), along with clubs and swords. The crowd comes under the authority of the chief priests and elders and includes both Roman soldiers and temple police: members of the temple guard (Luke 22:52). They are armed as if they have come to capture a revolutionary intent on overthrowing the Romans.

Matthew has written of Judas' offer to sell Jesus' whereabouts to the chief priests (Matthew 26:14–16). In the ancient world, there were no photographs, and clothing and hairstyles were much less diverse. Without someone to personally identify a wanted man, capture could be difficult. Away from a crowd, Jesus

enemies needed someone close to Him to make an arrest. Judas received 30 pieces of silver for this information.

It's possible that Judas first led the crowd to the upper room where the Passover meal was held (John 13:29–30), found it empty, and then came to this spot where he had come before with Jesus and the disciples (Matthew 24:3).

Context Summary

Matthew 26:47–56 paints the scene of Jesus' betrayal and arrest in the garden of Gethsemane. Judas arrives leading an armed crowd of soldiers, temple guards, and others. Judas identifies Jesus to the arresting crowd using a friend's kiss. Peter (John 18:10) wildly swings a sword and cuts a man's ear off in a misguided effort to defend Jesus. Jesus tells him to put the sword away. If He wanted saving, He could ask the Father and 12 legions of angels would arrive. He will not resist. The Scriptures of the prophets must be fulfilled. This passage parallels Mark 14:43–50, Luke 22:47–53, and John 18:1–11.

Matthew 26:48, NIV: Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: 'The one I kiss is the man; arrest him.'

What does Matthew 26:48 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Judas' job was to lead the chief priests to Jesus and quickly identify Him for the soldiers and temple police to arrest (Matthew 26:14–16). It is unclear how many of the priests and elders were present in the garden at this late hour. Judas had arrived, though, with a crowd carrying swords and clubs and torches. They may have thought they had come to capture an armed rebel bent on revolution (John 11:48; Luke 23:2).

Matthew again calls Judas simply "the betrayer." Judas had worked out a sign with the security forces ahead of time. He would use a friendly, seemingly harmless kiss to identify Him the target. That was the Person they were to seize and arrest.

Given Jesus' conflict with authorities and His public preaching, modern audiences might wonder why Judas needed to identify Jesus, rather than simply tell His enemies where to find Him. For one thing, it was late at night and dark.

For another, those who came to take Jesus away may have never seen Him before, even if they had heard much about Him. Without the existence of pictures or television, famous people were not always recognizable by sight. Clothes and personal appearance, in that era, were relatively uniform. The chief priests did not want to take any chances about arresting the wrong man—or having one of the disciples pretend to be Him—and allowing Jesus to escape.

Matthew 26:49, NIV: Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, 'Greetings, Rabbi!' and kissed him.

What does Matthew 26:49 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Judas Iscariot earns the name he will carry for all of history. Jesus and Matthew have called him "the betrayer" (Matthew 26:46, 48) and now he carries out the role. This was a moment arranged by Judas (Matthew 26:14–16) for reasons that are not entirely clear. He was paid for his betrayal, but not an outrageous amount. He may have been disillusioned with Christ's refusal to trigger rebellion against Rome. He may have become bitter and doubtful. It might have been a combination of all three: greed, disappointment, and spite. All we know for sure is that Satan tempted Judas, one of Christ's closest companions, to hand Him over to death (John 13:2, 26–27).

The sign used to identify Jesus was arranged beforehand (Matthew 26:48). Jesus was known by name and by reputation, but this was long before photographs or extremely diverse clothes. Judas needed to do more than just tell others where Jesus was; he needed to directly aim the mob at the right person.

This moment multiplies the awful, hateful nature of Judas' choice. This is meant to be an expression of mutual trust and friendship, and the words he uses are meant to show respect. Other gospel writers offer additional details. Luke reports (Luke 22:48) that Jesus asks pointedly, "Judas, would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?" Jesus didn't want Judas to miss the weight of what he was doing. Not only is he acting as a traitor, but he's also doing it using a vile perversion of pretended love.

Matthew 26:50, NIV: Jesus replied, 'Do what you came for, friend.' Then the men stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested him.

What does Matthew 26:50 mean? [[↑](#) [See verse text](#) [↑](#)]

The traitor Judas Iscariot (Matthew 26:14–16, 48) has done his work. He has led the crowd of soldiers and temple police to Jesus and has identified the One to be arrested with a kiss. Jesus does not resist. He calls Judas "friend," an especially cutting remark, since Judas is using pretended friendship to betray Jesus to His death. Rather than resist, Jesus simply tells Judas to go about his business.

Judas may have expected a fight, and not necessarily from Jesus. The disciples are armed (Luke 22:38) and Peter has declared his willingness to die for Christ (Luke 22:33). Jesus, for His part, makes no effort whatsoever to resist. Other gospel writers add details to the scene. John, especially, notes that Jesus is making a deliberate choice to make this an easy arrest. When they identified their target, He replied, "I am he" (John 18:4–6). They all fell to the ground, either out of fear or in response to some power that Jesus released in that moment.

Still, Jesus did not resist or run. He once more identified Himself and told the crowd of arresters to let those who were with Him go (John 18:8). Ignoring that advice is Peter (John 18:10), who will react with violence (Matthew 26:51).

Matthew 26:51, NIV: With that, one of Jesus' companions reached for his sword, drew it out and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear.

What does Matthew 26:51 mean? [[↑](#) [See verse text](#) [↑](#)]

A crowd of soldiers and temple police have been sent by the chief priests and elders to arrest Jesus (Matthew 26:48–50). One of His own disciples, Judas, has led them here and has identified Jesus with a kiss (Matthew 26:14–16). Jesus is not resisting or attempting to run.

One of the disciples, though, resists with violence. John tells us that disciple is Peter (John 18:10), which is not a surprise. It's possible Peter was still stinging

from Jesus' declaration that he would deny the Lord three times before morning (Matthew 26:30–35). Peter had insisted that he would not abandon Jesus and would certainly die with Him. He was clearly ready to take his stand with Jesus against an entire crowd of armed men.

Of course, Peter is no soldier. In that era, it was assumed that all people wielded a sword in their right hand. For Peter to hit his target's right side (Luke 22:50) suggests a strange incident. Either Peter swung overhand, or missed at first and took another swipe, or the target was facing away from him at that moment. Some commentators suggest that Peter was taking a wild swing at Judas and simply missed, striking a man nearby. For whatever reason, and in whatever way, Peter succeeds in cutting off Malchus' right ear (John 18:10).

Jesus makes it clear in the following verse that Peter was missing the point. He was using the wrong method, at the wrong time, on the wrong person (Matthew 26:52).

Matthew 26:52, NIV: Put your sword back in its place,' Jesus said to him, 'for all who draw the sword will die by the sword.

What does Matthew 26:52 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Matthew does not name the disciple who jumped in to defend Jesus from the crowd that had come to arrest him. John, though, lets us know that disciple was Peter (John 18:10). Peter may have thought the moment of truth Jesus warned him about had come. Jesus told the disciples they would all abandon Him and told Peter that he would deny Jesus three times before morning (Matthew 26:30–35). Peter likely wanted to show Jesus that he was not afraid to die defending him right then and there. So, Peter drew the sword he brought with him (Luke 22:38) and swung it, cutting off the right ear of a servant (Luke 22:50). Peter is not a trained warrior, and some commentators suspect he was really aiming for Judas.

Jesus is not interested in an armed conflict in this moment. According to Luke, Christ immediately heals the servant's ear (Luke 22:51). Jesus rebukes Peter for trying to use violence to stop what is meant by God to happen in this moment.

Some have pointed to Jesus' words here as a reason to never take up arms in conflict. That is reading too much into this event. He does not tell Peter to throw the sword away, but to put it back into its sheath. We know from John's account that Jesus told his arresters to let His disciples go (John 18:8). In that context, Jesus seems likely to mean that He does not wish for Peter to die by the sword tonight in a foolish attempt to save Him. Christ, Himself, does not need to be protected by an earthly sword (John 18:36).

Jesus will go on to say that He does not need to be defended from what is happening because, ultimately, this is the reason He has come (Matthew 26:53).

Matthew 26:53, NIV: Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?

What does Matthew 26:53 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Peter may have thought he was proving himself to Jesus. He lashed out with a sword, probably with the clumsy wildness of an amateur, and maimed a servant who was part of the crowd (Matthew 26:51; John 18:10). This may have been an effort to win back the Master's respect, after Jesus said Peter would deny Him that night (Matthew 26:30–35). This earned Peter an immediate rebuke (Matthew 26:52) and a command to put his sword back into its sheath. Other gospels note that Jesus explicitly told the arresting mob to let the disciples go (John 18:8–9). Peter's actions are liable to get him killed.

Not only was this reaction dangerous, but incredibly foolish. Of all people, Jesus Christ is the last who would need to be defended using an earthly weapon (John 18:36). Jesus makes that point in dramatic fashion, comparing angel armies to Roman armies. A Roman legion at full strength had approximately 6,000 soldiers. Taken literally, Jesus is saying God the Father could send 72,000 angels to defend Him if asked. A single angel is credited, in the Old Testament, with killing 186,000 Assyrian soldiers (2 Kings 19:35). Does the Son of the living God really need a fisherman to step in and attack those who came to arrest Him?

Jesus' words may sound belittling, but He wants everyone listening to understand clearly that these men cannot arrest Him against His will. He will go with them by

His own choice. He is submitting to the will of His Father. He does not want to be defended from fulfilling His purpose. John's account of these events makes that even more obvious (John 18:4–8).

Matthew 26:54, NIV: But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?’

What does Matthew 26:54 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Earlier in the garden, Jesus was in agony (Matthew 26:36–38). He prayed to God the Father that, if possible, the impending suffering could pass from Him. He never wavered, however, in a commitment to submit to the will of God the Father above His own (Matthew 26:39). It's not that Jesus couldn't stop other people from harming Him. He is submissive to the Father's will, but Jesus revealed in the previous verse that the Father would also be responsive to Jesus' appeal to stop it. God the Father would send 12 legions of angels—72,000 beings of indescribable power (2 Kings 19:35)—to step in if Jesus asked Him to (Matthew 26:53).

Jesus wants everyone to know that He is choosing, by His own determination, to submit to the Father's will (Philippians 2:8). He will cooperate with God's plan for this night and the following day (Matthew 16:21). He will not turn back now.

In addition, Jesus notes that this is a fulfillment of prophecy. Every Scripture about the suffering and death of the Messiah would be broken if He did not willingly go with those who had come to arrest Him. Jesus did not need Peter (Matthew 26:51–52) to fight for Him.

Matthew 26:55, NIV: In that hour Jesus said to the crowd, 'Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? Every day I sat in the temple courts teaching, and you did not arrest me.

What does Matthew 26:55 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Jesus has rebuked Peter (Matthew 26:51–52) and any other disciples who may have been thinking about jumping in to fight those who had come to arrest the Lord. If Jesus Christ had not wanted to be arrested, He would not have needed their help. The power of heaven would be unleashed on His behalf (Matthew 26:53). In fact, their decision to battle with swords would just get them killed. Jesus is going to go with those who have come for Him because He wants to (John 18:4–8), because it is His Father's will (Matthew 26:42), and because it is how He will fulfill the prophecies about Him (Matthew 26:54).

However, just because Christ knows what will happen (Matthew 16:21) and goes willingly, that does not mean He won't point out the absurdity of the situation. He turns toward those who have come in a large mob, with swords and clubs, in a secluded garden, in the dark of night. He mocks them by asking if they came to arrest a robber. Did they expect Him to put up a fight? He points out that He spent many days teaching publicly, coming and going freely, and they didn't seize Him then.

Jesus knows why this is, and so do most of the men who came to make the arrest. The Jewish religious leaders don't want to stir up the crowds who respected Jesus and thought of Him as a prophet of God (John 11:47–48, 57). They did not want to threaten their position with the people. They wanted to get rid of Jesus quietly, under cover of darkness, which they would attempt to do this very night before the people could figure out what was going on. Part of that plan is to pin Jesus' death on the already-hated Romans (Matthew 27:1–2; Mark 10:33; Luke 18:32).

Matthew 26:56, **NIV**: But this has all taken place that the writings of the prophets might be fulfilled.' Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.

What does Matthew 26:56 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Jesus has told His own disciples not to fight to defend Him from being arrested (Matthew 26:51–54), and now He has mocked those who have come for Him. They brought a miniature army, with clubs and swords, as if they would need

those to capture some violent bandit. Christ is making it clear that He is going willingly with those who have come for Him (Philippians 2:8; Matthew 26:42).

At least one reason for these declarations is to prevent anyone else from getting hurt. John said that Jesus clearly identified Himself and told those who had come to arrest Him to let His disciples go (John 18:8). Along those same lines, He instantly healed the man Peter had wounded and told Peter and the others not to fight (Luke 22:51).

Finally, Jesus emphasizes to everyone present that His arrest and the events to follow will fulfill the Scriptures of the prophets. Nothing is happening which is not supposed to happen. It's the opposite: this is the moment God has been engineering all along. Jesus will not stop it, because it's why He has come (John 18:36–37).

At those words all the disciples scatter into the darkness. Matthew writes that they "left him," in the sense that they all abandoned Jesus. This is what Jesus said they would do just a few hours earlier (Matthew 26:31). This is a natural reaction to being faced by an arresting mob. However, it's clear Jesus *wanted* the disciples to get away for their own safety. They need to be preserved to start, in the coming weeks and months, the work for which He had trained them (John 16:12–15).

For now, the disciples will feel the danger of being associated with Jesus. They will experience the confusion and sadness resulting from His arrest and conviction (John 20:19).

Matthew 26:57, NIV: Those who had arrested Jesus took him to Caiaphas the high priest, where the teachers of the law and the elders had assembled.

What does Matthew 26:57 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Led by Judas (Matthew 26:25), the betrayer (Matthew 26:48), a group of Roman soldiers and Jewish temple guards have seized Jesus and bound Him (John 18:12). They now bring Jesus to the home of the high priest Caiaphas. At the

same time, the members of the Jewish ruling body, the Sanhedrin, are being gathered in another part of Caiaphas' mansion to meet about Jesus.

Matthew does not record Jesus' first interview with Annas, the former high priest before Caiaphas. Annas was Caiaphas's father-in-law. He had been removed from his position by secular authorities, and many of the Jewish people still considered him the "true" high priest. Jesus was taken to both men, likely to get a guilty verdict from everyone with any authority before the people could object to Jesus' arrest and trials.

John records Jesus' brief first interview with Annas before He was sent to Caiaphas. Annas questions Jesus about His teaching. Jesus responds that He has taught openly and in public for all to hear, suggesting that Annas ask others what they heard Him say. One of the officers strikes Jesus for this supposed disrespect. Jesus challenges the man, and Annas sends Jesus to appear before Roman-appointed Caiaphas (John 18:19–24).

Matthew 26:58, NIV: But Peter followed him at a distance, right up to the courtyard of the high priest. He entered and sat down with the guards to see the outcome.

What does Matthew 26:58 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Peter acted with some degree of courage when Roman soldiers and Jewish temple officers came to arrest Jesus (John 18:10). Jesus, though, rebuked Peter for trying to defend Him with a sword (Matthew 26:51–53). Still, Peter has not fully abandoned Jesus. He and John have secretly followed the crowd escorting Jesus to the home of the high priest (John 18:15). This is not a wise move, especially since Jesus made efforts to keep the disciples away from His enemies (John 18:8).

Finally, as Jesus is appearing before Caiaphas and the gathered council in Caiaphas' mansion, Peter works his way inside and sits with the guards to see what will be done with Jesus. Again, John's account provides more details. Peter is only able to get inside after John, who knows the family of the high priest, and he convinces a servant girl to let Peter enter (John 18:15–16).

Matthew 26:59, NIV: The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death.

What does Matthew 26:59 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

The Jewish ruling body was known as the Sanhedrin. It included the high priest, along with 70 men made up of priests, teachers of the law, and laymen known as elders. It's likely not all 70 were gathered at this hasty late-night trial conducted in Caiaphas' mansion. Only 23 would have been needed to make any decisions official.

Matthew makes it clear this is only a "trial" by appearances. The chief priests and the council had already decided the verdict and the sentence: they wanted to put Jesus to death. They just needed evidence they can use to justify their prejudice. This leads them to seek false testimony about Jesus that would allow them to condemn Him. This is not only unethical, but punishable, in this case by death, under Mosaic law (Deuteronomy 19:18).

These ruling religious leaders hated Jesus for what He had said about them (Matthew 23:1–7). They rejected and despised what He said about Himself (John 15:18). They did not want to disrupt the status quo with the Romans (John 11:48), to the point of rejecting their own long-promised Messiah (John 5:39–40). Given His popularity (Mark 12:12) and invincibility in public debate (Luke 20:40), Jesus had to die if they were going to continue in their positions of power and influence over the people.

Matthew 26:60, NIV: But they did not find any, though many false witnesses came forward. Finally two came forward

What does Matthew 26:60 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

The chief priests and ruling council known as the Sanhedrin were ready to see Jesus put to death by the Romans (Matthew 26:57–59). Though they've already passed a verdict and sentence in their own minds, they need official charges with

which to charge Him. To get this, they look for people willing to make misleading or false claims. To seek Jesus' death out of prejudice is already wicked (John 11:53). To pursue false witnesses is a blatant violation of the same Law these men claim to uphold (Deuteronomy 19:18).

Unfortunately, it's not easy to coordinate these lies. Simply stating what Jesus has said and done isn't enough. Jesus, of course, had done nothing wrong. No true statement is going to show that He's committed any sin or crime (John 8:46). Those attempting to twist Christ's words into something damning wind up contradicting one another (Mark 14:56–59).

Two came forward with a statement that, itself, is not useful, but it provides an opening for the chief priest. Their account (Matthew 26:61) is a misquote.

Matthew 26:61, NIV: and declared, 'This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days.'

What does Matthew 26:61 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

To condemn someone to death under Jewish law (Matthew 26:57–59), two witnesses were required to verify the accusation. In this case, Jesus' enemies are looking for an act of blasphemy or sacrilege to show Jesus deserved to die. Unfortunately for them, Jesus has neither sinned nor committed a crime (John 8:46), so those who say otherwise wind up contradicting one another (Mark 14:56–59). Of course, all of this is so illegal that Jesus' accusers ought to be put to death, themselves (Deuteronomy 19:18), but they will press on.

Finally, two men came forward together to accuse Jesus of saying something the council can twist into a blasphemy charge. According to them, Jesus said He could rip down the physical temple in Jerusalem and then rebuild it in three days. That could be construed as a blasphemy against the temple—a thin charge for a death sentence, but better than nothing.

However, their quote is false. The witnesses had not only taken Jesus out of context, they've changed His words: "'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up'...But he was speaking about the temple of his body" (John 2:19–21).

It was this prediction that brought Jesus' followers greater faith after the resurrection: "When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken" (John 2:22). He has subtly declared He will be raised to life three days after being destroyed.

This accusation, itself, won't be needed. Jesus will be condemned by the Jewish religious leaders for words He will speak directly to them, in response to the high priest's challenge over this misquoted statement (Matthew 26:62)

Matthew 26:62, NIV: Then the high priest stood up and said to Jesus, 'Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?'

What does Matthew 26:62 mean? [[↑](#) [See verse text](#) [↑](#)]

The ruling council is seeking something they can accuse Jesus of that deserves a death sentence (Matthew 26:57–59). They are running out of options. After a string of failed false accusations (Mark 14:56–59), two men have finally misquoted Jesus, claiming He has said something which could be understood as blasphemy against the temple (Matthew 26:60–61). Not only are these not His actual words (John 2:19–21), but Jesus was speaking about His future resurrection from the dead.

Caiaphas wants to move things along. To make this sham trial at least appear valid, He wants to charge Jesus with something based directly on His own words before the council. The high priest insists Jesus answer this charge against Him. He's likely looking to trap Jesus in a lie, an admission of guilt, or some other mistake.

Jesus will not answer these prejudiced questions (Isaiah 53:7). When He does speak, He will utter a truth which the council interprets as blasphemy and sufficient to have Him killed.

Matthew 26:63, NIV: But Jesus remained silent. The high priest said to him, 'I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God.'

What does Matthew 26:63 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Caiaphas, the high priest, seems to be getting agitated. He wants Jesus to say something in front of the council they can use to charge Him with blasphemy and sentence Him to death (Matthew 26:57–62). He has demanded Jesus answer a charge from two witnesses, who claimed Jesus said He would destroy the temple in Jerusalem and rebuild it in three days. The supposed blasphemy—and false quotation (John 2:19–21)—was not enough to condemn Jesus to death. Caiaphas needed more.

Jesus, though, would not even answer that charge. He knew they had misquoted Him and that He had been talking about His own future resurrection, not the destruction of the city temple. He also knew that to get to His resurrection, He would have to be sentenced to death by the men before whom He stood now. He would not try to defend Himself from false charges (Isaiah 53:7).

Whether in frustration, or a moment of cleverness, Caiaphas finally hits on the most controversial statements Jesus ever suggested in His teaching. The high priest asks Jesus directly, challenging Him to swear by the living God, whether He is the Christ, the Son of God. In other words, is Jesus truly the Messiah?

Caiaphas' strategy might have been purely procedural. If Jesus resists, they may be able to charge Him with refusing to answer a question backed by a legal oath from the high priest. If He answers that He is not the Messiah, the crowds will no longer be stirred to possible rebellion (John 11:48). If Jesus says He is the Son of God, the council will use that declaration to sentence Him to death.

Of course, that requires these men to refuse to believe Jesus is, in fact, the Messiah (John 5:39–40). As it turns out, Jesus will answer this challenge with absolute truth, leaving no room for doubt about what He means. That's enough for His enemies to declare this sham trial a success (Matthew 26:64–66).

Matthew 26:64, NIV: 'You have said so,' Jesus replied. 'But I say to all of you: From now on you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.'

What does Matthew 26:64 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Caiaphas, the high priest, wants to sentence Jesus to death for blasphemy (Matthew 26:57–59). After several failed attempts, he finally challenges Jesus to answer whether He is the Christ—the Messiah—and the Son of God. These terms had created enormous controversy when Jesus used them in His ministry (John 5:18). Where Jesus ignored obviously false accusations thus far (Isaiah 53:7), He not only confirms this "accusation," He multiplies it with an absolute claim of divine power. This response gives the high priest and the council all they need to condemn Him.

Mark quotes Jesus as saying it more directly in the form of "I am." Matthew's quote, though, carries the same weight. Jesus is not being elusive. He is saying, in essence, "what you have said is so," or "that's exactly right."

Jesus doesn't stop there. He is more than just a human Messiah sent by God to set up an earthly kingdom. In fact, Jesus declares they will see Him, as the Son of Man, seated on God's right hand and coming back to earth on the clouds of heaven in judgment. The phrase "from now on" may mean "when you see me again in the future" or it may mean that Jesus is claiming to hold that position in their eyes, right in front of them, from now on. He stands before them not only as the future king, but the rightful king right now who will one day take the throne.

Jesus' words make direct reference to Psalm 110:1 and Daniel 7:13. They would have left no doubt in the minds of Caiaphas or those on the council: Jesus of Nazareth is claiming to be the eternal Messiah and Son of God. Their reaction corresponds to the enormous nature of Jesus' claims (Matthew 26:65).

From his perspective, Caiaphas could not have asked for a better answer. In his own mind, Caiaphas likely thinks he has baited Jesus into making an arrogant, exaggerated claim. He wanted to put Jesus to death (John 11:48–53), and this is a statement the council sees as blasphemous. At the same time, the high priest and the council would now be held responsible for rejecting the Son of God when He revealed Himself to them, face to face, for who He truly was (John 5:39–40).

Matthew 26:65, NIV: Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, 'He has spoken blasphemy! Why do we need any more witnesses? Look, now you have heard the blasphemy.'

What does Matthew 26:65 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Jesus has given the high priest and Jewish ruling council exactly what they wanted to condemn Him to death (Matthew 26:57–59). He has told them the truth about His identity. He has openly declared He is the Christ, the Son of God, who will sit on God's right hand and return in judgment on the clouds (Psalm 110:1; Daniel 7:13). Since these men have already rejected Jesus' ministry (John 5:39–40) and sought to kill Him (John 11:48–53), they are infuriated by this claim (Matthew 26:64).

In indignation and grief over this supposed affront to God's character, the high priest dramatically tears his robes. This was a common sign used to represent deep grief and rejection of some wicked action. It's the moment Caiaphas has been waiting for. He turns from Jesus to the council and declares that Jesus has uttered blasphemy. There is no more need for lying, misleading witnesses (Matthew 26:60; Mark 14:56–59). Everyone present has heard these words, and everyone has clearly understood what Jesus meant.

Caiaphas thinks he has won. However, Jesus has accomplished exactly what He needed to do. He has expected to be condemned and then crucified (Matthew 16:21). He will not resist what comes next.

Matthew 26:66, NIV: What do you think?' 'He is worthy of death,' they answered.

What does Matthew 26:66 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

In a tense moment, the high priest has pressed Jesus to answer a direct question, under oath before God, about whether He is the Christ, the Son of God (Matthew 26:62–63). Jesus has been waiting for this moment, as well, to make His official claim before Israel's official ruling body (Isaiah 53:7).

Jesus declares that He is indeed the Christ, the Messiah, who will wield the power of God Himself and return to earth to judge with God's judgment (Matthew 26:64). This references Psalm 110:1 as well as the prophecies of Daniel 7:13–14: "Behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed."

This is not a vague statement. There is no room, at all, for anyone to misunderstand what Jesus means here. This is a claim to not merely be the Chosen One of God, but a claim to *be God*. Fully grasping Jesus' claim—and rejecting it (John 5:39–40)—the high priest tears his robes, declares that they have all heard Jesus speak blasphemy, and demands the council make their judgment. Israel's ruling religious leaders answer instantly: He deserves death. This, of course, is what they'd already planned to do (John 11:48–53).

Israel, through the highest levels of leadership, has now formally rejected the Son of God as the Messiah (Matthew 23:37). They have scorned Him to His face and sentenced Him to die.

Matthew 26:67, NIV: Then they spit in his face and struck him with their fists. Others slapped him

What does Matthew 26:67 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

The high priest and the council have achieved what they had long since set out to do (John 11:48–53). They have crossed the legal barrier they could not previously overcome (Matthew 26:57–60). Based on His own words—true though they are—Jesus has been proclaimed guilty of blasphemy and sentenced to death (Matthew 26:61–66). The trial itself has not been legal in several ways. It has taken place in the middle of the night in the home of the high priest instead of during the daytime in the temple, and its outcome was decided before the trial even began. False witnesses were used.

None of that really matters, though, because what was needed has been accomplished. Jesus has revealed Himself as the Christ to Israel's religious leaders and has been officially rejected and condemned (Matthew 16:21). They have been given the opportunity to receive God's Son, and they have decided instead to kill Him (John 5:39–40).

At this point, abuse of Jesus begins to get more serious. Either the members of the Sanhedrin themselves or their servants or guards begin to spit in Jesus' face and strike Him. The word "struck" here is from a Greek term which is often translated as "beat," and often refers to use of fists. Christ is now being beaten and mocked. According to the Jewish leaders, He is a false Messiah who will soon die.

While Scripture does not say so directly, this abuse may also serve another purpose. Jesus' enemies may feel that their ability to mock and mistreat Him is more evidence that He is not really the Son of God. In their minds, the real Messiah would immediately put an end to such things. He would lash out and strike down all who strike Him. They do not know that He is choosing not to resist, not to defend Himself, so He can carry out the will of His Father (Matthew 26:42).

Jesus flattened a group of soldiers with a mere word earlier that evening (John 18:4–7); if any of them were there, one can only imagine what they thought of this moment.

Matthew 26:68, NIV: and said, 'Prophecy to us, Messiah. Who hit you?'

What does Matthew 26:68 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Jesus has declared Himself to be the one and true Messiah (Matthew 26:64). This has left no possible room for misinterpretation: Jesus says He is not only the Savior, not only favored by God, but that He *is* God. The high priest and council have condemned Him for blasphemy and sentenced Him to die (Matthew 26:65–67). Now the abuse has begun. Some spit in His face and beat Him.

Mark clarifies that Jesus is blindfolded at this point (Mark 14:65). This is why abusers mock Him by telling Him to prophesy about who is hitting Him. Their point is that if Jesus were really the Christ, He would know this supernaturally.

Jesus, of course, knows all of this (Matthew 16:21). He has resolved Himself to submit to His Father's will and take all the cruelty which comes His way (Matthew 26:42). He will refuse to resist or ask His Father to send 12 legions of angels to save Him (Matthew 26:53). He will walk to the cross as a lamb to the slaughter to die for the sins of humanity as the sinless Son of God (Acts 8:32–35; Philippians 2:8).

Matthew 26:69, NIV: Now Peter was sitting out in the courtyard, and a servant girl came to him. 'You also were with Jesus of Galilee,' she said.

What does Matthew 26:69 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

As Jesus begins to suffer physical abuse (Matthew 26:67–68), the scene shifts to Peter just outside in the courtyard of the high priest's home (Matthew 26:57). He is in the most dangerous place he could possibly be at this moment. His master has just been condemned to death for blasphemy (Matthew 26:64–66). This is not where Jesus wanted Peter to be (John 18:8), though He has already predicted what will happen (Matthew 26:30–35).

A servant girl approaches Peter with an accusation. She has recognized him. She says that he was with Jesus the Galilean—a connection others will make due to Peter's distinctive regional accent (Matthew 26:73). Peter knows if he acknowledges his connection to Jesus in this moment, he may well be arrested. He could also be tried and suffer the same sentence as the "false Messiah."

Peter, once ready to die with Jesus fighting a group of soldiers at Gethsemane (Matthew 26:51; John 18:10), is now pressured to decide whether to admit his relationship with Jesus to a servant girl.

Context Summary

Matthew 26:69–75 finds Peter sitting outside in the courtyard of the high priest's home. Inside, Jesus is being unfairly convicted and condemned to die. Three

times, Peter is accused of being a Jesus-follower. Three times, he denies even knowing Jesus, swearing oaths and cursing himself if he is lying. Hearing a rooster, Peter remembers Jesus had said he would deny Him in exactly this way. The man who bragged he would die before turning from Jesus now flees in tears of shame. Parallel accounts are found in Mark 14:66–72, Luke 22:54–62, John 18:15–18, and John 18:25–27.

Matthew 26:70, NIV: But he denied it before them all. 'I don't know what you're talking about,' he said.

What does Matthew 26:70 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Several hours ago, Jesus had told His disciples they would fall away—to lose courage and run—because of Him (Matthew 26:30–32). Peter insisted he would never abandon Jesus, even if everyone else did. Jesus told Peter that not only would he fall away, but he would even deny Jesus three times before the rooster crowed. Peter insisted he would die first (Matthew 26:33–35). The bravery shown when he lashed out in the garden (Matthew 26:51; John 18:10) seems to have passed.

Peter now comes to the predicted moment of choice. He is in the courtyard of the high priest's home (Matthew 26:69). Perhaps he has heard the judgment from inside that Jesus has been found guilty by the Sanhedrin and condemned to die. This is not where Jesus wants Him to be (John 18:8), but Peter has come, anyway. A servant girl has approached Peter. She is sure he is one of those with Jesus. At least part of this is due to Peter's distinctive Galilean accent (Matthew 26:73).

Now Peter chooses not to face risk, but to deny Jesus "before them all." He pleads ignorance: the first of his three denials of Christ.

Matthew 26:71, NIV: Then he went out to the gateway, where another servant girl saw him and said to the people there, 'This fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth.'

What does Matthew 26:71 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Jesus said Peter would deny Him three times before morning came on this endless-seeming night (Matthew 26:30–35). Peter said he would die before doing that. That was before he knew he would be sitting in the courtyard of the high priest immediately following Jesus' death sentence inside (Matthew 26:69).

One servant girl has said that she knows Peter as one who was with Jesus. Peter is only here because John, who knows the family of the high priest, was able to gain access (John 18:15–18). The girl might have seen the disciples with Jesus. Peter denies his association with Christ, to everyone who heard this, and starts to move away. He got as far as the entrance to the courtyard when another servant girl saw him. This one made her accusation to those standing around Peter: this is one of the followers of Jesus of Nazareth.

Peter knows he's in a vulnerable position. The guards who brought Jesus bound to this household could easily grab him and haul him inside, as well.

Matthew 26:72, NIV: He denied it again, with an oath: 'I don't know the man!'

What does Matthew 26:72 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Peter has been accused, for the second time, of being associated with the now-condemned Jesus (Matthew 26:69–71). Since Peter is in the courtyard of the high priest's house, he recognizes that he is in real danger (Matthew 26:64–66).

For the second time, Peter denies any association with Jesus. He swears by an oath not merely that he is not a follower, but that He does not even know Jesus, at all. The use of an oath means Peter swears by something sacred that he is telling the truth. Peter likely remembered well that Jesus had condemned exactly this kind of oath-swearing, saying instead, "Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil" (Matthew 5:37).

Peter's oath and denial shows how desperate he is to get away and save himself from possible arrest and execution. This is the second of three predicted failures (Matthew 26:30–35). Unfortunately for Peter, the more he speaks, the more his

Galilean accent reminds people of those who are closest to Jesus (Matthew 26:73).

Matthew 26:73, NIV: After a little while, those standing there went up to Peter and said, 'Surely you are one of them; your accent gives you away.'

What does Matthew 26:73 mean? [[↑](#) [See verse text](#) [↑](#)]

For the third time, Peter is accused of being a disciple of Jesus. These servants in the courtyard of the high priest's home have called Jesus "the Galilean" and "Jesus of Nazareth." Their association with this just-condemned "false messiah" is that He is from up north in the region of Galilee (Matthew 26:69–72).

As is the case in many nations, people from different parts of Israel had different accents. Those from the metropolis of Jerusalem did not pronounce words exactly as did those from the small towns to the north. Those who had heard Peter accused of being with Jesus, by the servant girls, now approach to say he even *sounds* like Jesus: "Your accent betrays you."

Morning is close. Jesus told Peter he would deny him three times before the rooster crowed (Matthew 26:30–35). Peter has denied even knowing Jesus twice so far. He's about to make it three.

Matthew 26:74, NIV: Then he began to call down curses, and he swore to them, 'I don't know the man!' Immediately a rooster crowed.

What does Matthew 26:74 mean? [[↑](#) [See verse text](#) [↑](#)]

Peter told Jesus he would die before ever denying him (Matthew 26:30–35). In that spirit, he had pulled a sword and attacked those coming to arrest Jesus earlier that night (Matthew 26:51; John 18:10). Jesus, though, had rebuked Peter for fighting, submitting to His own arrest (Matthew 26:52–54). By this time, Peter may have heard the report from inside the high priest's house that Jesus had been found guilty and condemned to die (Matthew 26:64–66).

When people in the courtyard began to accuse Peter of being with Jesus, he recognized he was in real danger of being arrested and executed. Suddenly, his courage has failed, and he does not want to die. Before he can leave, though, he is approached one more time by people in the courtyard who recognize his accent is like that of the "Galilean" condemned to death (Matthew 26:73).

Peter begins to swear a curse on himself if he is lying. He once again vows on something sacred that he truly, really, honestly doesn't even know Jesus, at all. Following that third denial, the rooster crows signaling morning has come. Jesus' words have proved true, and Peter knows that he has proved faithless to his master, after all (Matthew 26:75).

Matthew 26:75, NIV: Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken: 'Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.' And he went outside and wept bitterly.

What does Matthew 26:75 mean? [[↑](#) [See verse text](#) [↑](#)]

An unpleasant realization has come back to Peter in a rush, in a single moment. Christ had told Peter he would deny Jesus three times before the rooster crowed (Matthew 26:30–35). Peter had boldly and brashly declared that he would die with Jesus before such a thing could happen. He'd wielded a sword in a misguided attempt to prevent Jesus' arrest (Matthew 26:51; John 18:10). Now the rooster had called out and Peter is painfully aware of his denials: three, just as Jesus had said.

Peter had the chance to follow through on his earlier pledge of loyalty. He was in the courtyard of the home where Jesus was condemned to die, where Jesus was being beaten (Matthew 26:64–69). All Peter had to do was admit that, yes, he was one of Jesus' disciples. He could declare he did in fact believe that Jesus was the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matthew 16:15–17). That would have been honest, even if it might have resulted in being taken for death, rather than denying the Lord.

Peter finally got away from danger after his third denial. This is not a clean escape, however. The crushing weight of his own disloyalty, cowardice, and lies

is crashing down around him. Eventually, Peter will come to know that Jesus did not want him to die that night (John 18:8). He would experience Jesus' forgiveness and learn that he would one day die for Jesus, after all (John 21:18–19). Tonight, though, Peter would suffer in knowing that he was not as strong in himself as he thought he was. He would need that humility to carry out what God had next for him in the coming weeks, months, and years.

Matthew 27:1, NIV: Early in the morning, all the chief priests and the elders of the people made their plans how to have Jesus executed.

What does Matthew 27:1 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

During a hasty sham trial, conducted in the night at the home of the chief priest, Jesus had been found guilty and deserving of death. This involved at least some members of the Jewish ruling council known as the Sanhedrin. Using language from Psalm 110:1 and Daniel 7:13, Jesus had "confessed" to being the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of God. Since the Jewish religious leaders refused to believe this could possibly be true, they convicted Him of blasphemy (Matthew 26:57–68).

However, that trial was not technically legal. Traditional Jewish law of that time required any trial involving a death penalty offense to be held openly during the day. Such an event would normally have taken place in the temple. So, when morning arrives, a second, ceremonial "trial" is convened. They simply affirm the verdict the group had made under the cover of darkness, which is also the same sentence determined long before (John 11:53): Jesus was to be put to death.

Context Summary

Matthew 27:1–2 briefly describes events taking place on the morning following Jesus' conviction and condemnation during the night. Jewish legal procedure of the time required a death penalty trial to be held during the daytime. For the sake of appearances, the council again condemned Jesus and sentenced Him to death. They did not have the authority to enact such a sentence, however. They needed Roman approval to do that. So, they tie Jesus up and march Him over to

Pilate, the Roman governor of the region, in hopes he will agree to have Jesus executed. Mark 15:1, Luke 23:1, and John 18:28 offer the same information.

Matthew 27:2, NIV: So they bound him, led him away and handed him over to Pilate the governor.

What does Matthew 27:2 mean? [[↑](#) [See verse text](#) [↑](#)]

The Sanhedrin, the Jewish religious ruling body, had found Jesus guilty of blasphemy for His claim to be the Messiah. Although the trial was entirely false (Matthew 26:57–68), and the verdict decided long before (John 11:53), they agreed on a sentence of death. Jewish law of the time, however, said such trials had to happen in openness and during the day. To wiggle around this requirement, a hasty repeat of the verdict is given after morning breaks (Matthew 27:1).

Jesus' enemies have another problem. Under Roman law, they did not have the authority to put prisoners to death. Only the Romans could perform legal executions. To accomplish their death sentence, Jerusalem's religious leaders will need the Roman governor of their region to give the order. To that end, they send a captive Jesus to Pontius Pilate for yet another verdict and sentence.

Christ's predictions about these events continue to be fulfilled exactly as He said: "The Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles" (Matthew 20:18–19). Jesus continues to offer no resistance to those who accuse, beat, and march Him from place to place. He knows He is exactly where His Father means for Him to be.

Pontius Pilate served as the governor of the region of Judea from 26 to 36 AD. Sources outside the Bible describe Pilate as cruel, unfavorable to the Jewish people, and sometimes insecure. His tenure was marked by acts of violence, and he was eventually replaced. In 1961, an inscription was discovered in Caesarea Maritima that mentioned Pilate as a prefect in the region. He apparently only came to Jerusalem during feasts or festivals or when there was likely to be trouble that required his attention.

Matthew 27:3, NIV: When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders.

What does Matthew 27:3 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

As before, Matthew shifts the scene away from Jesus to one of His disciples. The previous chapter ended with Peter denying Jesus three times before the rooster crowed, just as the Lord said he would (Matthew 26:69–75). He then escaped, weeping bitterly at his failure to stand with Jesus at the risk of his own life.

Now the scene turns to Judas, again labeled as a disloyal traitor. Unlike Peter, Judas did not lose a struggle with himself to stay true to Jesus. He made a commitment to betray Jesus, in advance, then followed through with it (Matthew 26:14–16). Only after the betrayal was complete did Judas begin to regret his choice.

Seeing Jesus' death sentence from the Sanhedrin apparently changed Judas' mind. It is unknown what he expected to happen to Jesus. Perhaps he could not imagine any crime for which Jesus could be found guilty. Perhaps he wanted to force Jesus to use His extraordinary powers in a confrontation that would finally bring Him to the throne of Israel. He might simply have come to realize the hateful evil of what he had done. In any case, it is only now, after the fact, that Judas seems to believe Jesus should not die (Matthew 27:4).

The chief priests and elders had given Judas thirty pieces of silver for his role as a traitor. Now Judas brings it back, hoping to reverse his action in some way. Here, as well, it's unclear what he hoped to accomplish.

Context Summary

Matthew 27:3–10 reveals Judas' deep regret for betraying Jesus. He brings the 30 pieces of silver back to the chief priests and elders who paid him for his cooperation. They don't want the money back, and they're not interested in Judas' confession. Judas throws the money down in the temple and hangs himself. The priests use the money to buy a field for burying foreigners. They call

it the Field of Blood. Matthew states that this fulfills prophecy and quotes from Zechariah. The book of Acts also recounts Judas' death (Acts 1:16–20).

Matthew 27:4, NIV: I have sinned,' he said, 'for I have betrayed innocent blood.' 'What is that to us?' they replied. 'That's your responsibility.'

What does Matthew 27:4 mean? [[↑](#) [See verse text](#) [↑](#)]

Matthew's gospel is the only to reveal that Judas came to regret betraying Jesus to the chief priests and elders. Luke also takes note of Judas' eventual suicide in his second volume (Acts 1:16–20). Once Judas understood that Jesus had been condemned to death, he was devastated. It's not known what Judas expected to happen. For whatever reason, he either did not expect that Jesus would be killed, or he finally scrapes up enough of a conscience to see his error.

Judas has returned to the Jewish religious leaders who gave him the thirty pieces of silver to turn Jesus over to them (Matthew 26:14–16). He wants to give the money back, seeming to wish he could reverse what he has done. He confesses to them openly that he was wrong, and that Jesus is innocent. In a courtroom setting, Judas would have been condemned to death for this (Deuteronomy 19:18–19). Now, far too late, he tried to convince those who could do something about it.

The religious leaders Judas meets with, however, are not interested in his confession. Their response can be taken in more than one way. In Greek, expressions such as "what does this have to do with me?" implied the speaker had no reason to be involved (John 2:4). Now that the deed is done, Jesus' enemies might have been pretending that it never happened. If Jesus' innocence is clear, their payment to Judas could be seen as a bribe (Exodus 23:8). If they acknowledge that Judas worked under their orders, it will stir suspicion. While that seems unlikely, these men would have every reason to want Judas to take his guilty conscience elsewhere.

The other possibility is that their response is coldly literal: "oh, well, that's not our problem." They may simply be telling Judas to "deal with it."

Bible teachers disagree about the extent of Judas' repentance. He clearly feels remorse and confesses he is guilty of genuine sin. On the other hand, he does not express belief that Jesus is the Messiah or that he was wrong to abandon his master and the rest of the twelve. Mostly, he seems shocked and surprised by what has come from his actions. Only the degree of punishment Jesus suffers appears to be Judas' motivation for a change of heart. The only clear point is that whatever remorse Judas experienced was not enough to lead him to genuine faith in Christ (Matthew 26:24; Mark 14:21).

Matthew 27:5, NIV: So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself

What does Matthew 27:5 mean? [[↑↑ See verse text ↑↑](#)]

Judas is distraught. When he heard Jesus had been condemned to death, he regretted his decision to take thirty pieces of silver as payment for turning Jesus over to His enemies (Matthew 26:14–16). He has tried to give the money back, but the Jewish religious leaders who paid him don't want it. They also don't want to hear Judas' confession that he has sinned by betraying an innocent person (Matthew 27:1–4). Whether they are denying being involved, or merely callous, the religious leaders aren't taking the money back, or changing their minds.

His conscience is shouting at him, however, so Judas will not keep the money. He throws it down in the temple on his way out. He immediately goes off and commits suicide. His chosen method is hanging, likely meaning he jumped from a high ledge with a rope tied around his neck. The Book of Acts supports this theory with grisly details: as part of this suicide—or not long after—Judas' body fell and was splattered on the ground (Acts 1:16–18).

Some cultures have seen suicide as a noble way to end one's life under specific circumstances. Highly honor-driven cultures have used it to atone for shameful actions. Others see it as an acceptable way to avoid submissive death at another's hand. The strictest religious Jews of Judas' era, however, held a similar view of suicide as that of modern Christianity. Namely, that suicide is an act of tragically misguided despair, at best. It is a sinful rebellion against God's control over life, at worst. Especially tragic is that Judas' remorse led him to suicide, but not to real repentance (Matthew 26:24; Mark 14:21).

Matthew 27:6, [NIV](#): The chief priests picked up the coins and said, 'It is against the law to put this into the treasury, since it is blood money.'

What does Matthew 27:6 mean? [[↑↑ See verse text ↑↑](#)]

The chief priests demonstrate once more that Jesus was exactly right in condemning them for hypocrisy. They were willing to *pay* "blood money" to capture Jesus. Now, it seems, they are once again interested in legalism. They insist on following the law about not putting blood money in the treasury. The law they seem to have in mind is from Deuteronomy 23:18, "You shall not bring the fee of a prostitute or the wages of a dog [male prostitute] into the house of the Lord your God in payment for any vow, for both of these are an abomination to the Lord your God." A more general sense of the rule is that money made from immoral activity was not meant to be taken to the temple.

Hypocrisy aside, this incident reflects humanity's traditional view of traitors. Despite Judas' actions being exactly what the religious leaders always wanted (John 11:48–53), and those they actively encouraged (Matthew 26:14–16), they were still seen as noxious. Even those who benefitted from the betrayal, condemned the person who did it. Referring to this payment as "blood money" only highlights the shame of what Judas has done.

Matthew 27:7, [NIV](#): So they decided to use the money to buy the potter's field as a burial place for foreigners.

What does Matthew 27:7 mean? [[↑↑ See verse text ↑↑](#)]

Religious leaders who had paid Judas for betrayal (Matthew 26:14–16) still saw his actions as despicable and immoral. When Judas attempted to return the money, they refused it (Matthew 27:3–6). Not only that, but they also saw the money as tainted by Judas' actions and unsuitable to put in with other temple funds. Most likely, they don't want to leave more evidence of their illegal plot (John 11:48–53). So, they put their heads together and come up with a creative legal solution.

Apparently, interpretations of laws such as Deuteronomy 23:18 only meant the coins could not be "brought into" the temple. They did allow for such money to be used outside of Judaism for the common good of the community. The chief priests use Judas' returned fee to buy a field to be used as a burial place for foreigners in Israel. It's not known why it is called the "potter's field." Scholars speculate that it may have once belonged to a potter or it is possible that potters took clay from the field for their pots.

Matthew 27:8, NIV: That is why it has been called the Field of Blood to this day.

What does Matthew 27:8 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

It doesn't necessarily follow that a tract of land used as a burial place for foreigners would be called the "Field of Blood." However, this land was bought using money Judas returned after suffering remorse for his betrayal of Jesus (Matthew 26:14–16; Matthew 27:3–7). The priests called it "blood money," recognizing its use for a tainted purpose, and chose not to use the coins in the temple (Deuteronomy 23:18). It's possible that the location acquired its nickname once the truth of what had happened became clear.

Another possible explanation comes from Acts 1:18–19. This gives more details about Judas' suicide. In an aside, Luke, the writer of Acts, indicates poetically that Judas bought the field in question—as it was his money that purchased it—and then states that his guts burst out as he fell. The result of the payment to Judas was the acquisition of the field. That was the fruit of his labor. It doesn't mean he completed the transaction himself. Luke's description does suggest, though, that perhaps the priests bought the potter's field because that's where Judas hanged himself.

Bible scholars suggest several explanations for the vivid end to Judas's hanging. It may be that after he died, nobody wanted to defile themselves by touching the body for a time and the sun caused Judas' body to quickly decompose, fall, and burst open. Or, perhaps, Judas hanged himself from a limb over a ravine, common in the area, and the branch gave way before or after his death. Or, most simply of all maybe, Judas simply fell to his death while attempting to hang himself.

In any case, the name "Field of Blood" connects to the tragic circumstances of its purchase.

Matthew 27:9, NIV: Then what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: 'They took the thirty pieces of silver, the price set on him by the people of Israel,

What does Matthew 27:9 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Verses 9 and 10 take an approach to Old Testament Scripture which seems to lose something in translation. Matthew begins by saying that the purchase of the potter's field for the price of thirty pieces of silver is the direct fulfillment of prophecy (Matthew 27:3–8). He credits this, in literal terms, to Jeremiah. Jeremiah 19:1–13 deals with these same themes. However, the exact words Matthew cites seem to come almost directly from Zechariah 11:12–13.

Scholars suggest that Matthew blended the two prophecies and mentioned only the more prominent of the two prophets. Apparently, this was not an unheard-of practice. Mark 1:2–3 does something similar, mentioning the prophet Isaiah, but quoting from both Isaiah and Malachi. The primary point Matthew means to show is that this was yet another moment in the story of Jesus which was alluded to hundreds of years earlier by the prophets.

The designated amount of thirty pieces of silver was a reference to the market value of a maimed slave (Exodus 21:32).

Matthew 27:10, NIV: and they used them to buy the potter's field, as the Lord commanded me.'

What does Matthew 27:10 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

This concludes the prophecy Matthew references beginning in the previous verse (Matthew 27:9). The words come close to Zechariah 11:11–13. However, Matthew formally credits the prophetic prediction to the prophet Jeremiah. Bible scholars note direct parallels to the story of Judas and the content of Jeremiah

19:1–13. It's likely that Matthew referenced both prophets, seeing divine foresight in both, and mentioned only the more prominent of the two. This seems to have been a normal practice of the time, as Mark 1:2–3 makes a similar choice when citing Isaiah and Malachi.

Matthew's larger point is about the content of prophecy. Those statements closely connect to the story of Judas' death and the purchase of the potter's field (Matthew 27:3–8). This is yet more evidence that Jesus is the Messiah. Matthew, especially, has taken great care to connect prophecies from the Old Testament to many aspects of Jesus' life and ministry as a way of establishing for Jewish readers the validity of Jesus' claims to be the Christ.

Matthew 27:11, NIV: Meanwhile Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, 'Are you the king of the Jews?' 'You have said so,' Jesus replied.

Context Summary

Matthew 27:11–26 describes Jesus' trial before the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate. The Jewish religious leaders are asking Pilate to condemn Jesus to death, hurling accusations. Pilate is amazed that Jesus remains silent, barely saying anything in His own defense. Pilate offers the Passover crowds the choice between releasing Jesus or releasing Barabbas. They choose Barabbas and call for Jesus to be crucified. Pilate recognizes the obvious feud driving this persecution; he is more concerned with civil order than with justice. He agrees to execute Jesus while claiming no responsibility for the decision. Further details are found in Mark 15:1–15, Luke 23:1–25, and John 18:28–19:16.

What does Matthew 27:11 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

After describing the end of Judas' tragic story (Matthew 27:3–10), Matthew returns to Jesus. He is standing before the Roman governor Pilate. Early in the morning, some of the chief priests brought Jesus, bound, to Pilate's headquarters in Jerusalem. They will not enter, so Pilate comes out to see what they want. He asks what accusation they have against Jesus and why they don't judge Him according to their own Jewish law. They respond that Roman law will not allow them to put Jesus to death (John 18:28–32).

They tell Pilate, falsely, that Jesus has been misleading the Israelites and forbidding them from paying taxes to Caesar. They add that Jesus has been proclaiming Himself to be Christ, a king (Luke 23:2). The religious leaders are trying to come up with accusations that will convince Pilate that Jesus is a danger to Rome. One example is the issue of paying taxes. Jesus had famously replied to a trick question by saying the people should give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, referring specifically to money (Matthew 22:15–22).

Jesus' enemies are closer to the truth in saying that He claims to be a king. He has stated that He is the Messiah. Jesus, though, has no interest in taking the throne of Israel or overthrowing the Romans. Matthew picks up the story as Pilate turns to Jesus and asks about this issue. Jesus gives the same answer He gave to the high priest: the equivalent of "you are the one who said it." His answer clearly means yes, though there's more to be said than what Jesus offers. John notes that Jesus' answer made it clear He was not seeking a political overthrow of Rome (John 18:36).

Paul referred to this as a significant moment of revelation. He called this Jesus' "good confession" before Pilate (1 Timothy 6:13), a moment Jesus revealed His identity to the Gentiles.

Matthew 27:12, NIV: When he was accused by the chief priests and the elders, he gave no answer.

What does Matthew 27:12 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Matthew's book is full of the words of Jesus. In His teaching, Jesus spoke paragraph after paragraph of great and hard truth. His teaching was wise and powerful and weighty. Now, though, Jesus knows that the time for teaching has passed. Since being arrested (Matthew 26:47–56) His most common response to accusations and abuse has been silence. He does not resist. He knows He is bound for the cross to die for the sins of humanity, and He is not trying to escape it. What needs to have been said and done is obvious. His enemies know the truth about His teaching; they lie anyway to have Him killed (Matthew 26:59–65).

The Roman governor, who can see clearly that Jesus is innocent (Matthew 27:18) will soon ignore justice for the sake of stability (Matthew 27:24).

This is why Isaiah prophesied the Messiah would be silent: "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth" (Isaiah 53:7).

It bothered Pilate that Jesus would not defend Himself against the repeated accusations of the chief priests and elders. How was He to decide if Jesus was worthy of death or not if Jesus would not respond? Details in other gospels, combined with Matthew, suggest that Pilate might have hoped to catch those religious leaders in their own lies (John 19:10–11).

Matthew 27:13, NIV: Then Pilate asked him, 'Don't you hear the testimony they are bringing against you?'

What does Matthew 27:13 mean? [[↑](#) [See verse text](#) [↑](#)]

Pontius Pilate was no friend to the Jewish ruling council, the Sanhedrin. History depicts Pilate as harsh and cruel. He was reported not to like the Jewish people, in general. Prior to Jesus' arrival, he was associated with incidents of civil unrest prompted by his own arrogant insults of the Jewish people. Afterwards, he was removed from his position, apparently due to another such ugly scene. He recognizes the personal vendetta Jesus' enemies are pursuing (Matthew 27:18). He was not the kind of politician to condemn a prisoner just to satisfy a high priest. However, the fragility of his political position may have been known, and one reason the religious leaders have come with an agitated crowd (Matthew 27:24).

The question Pilate asks here is incredulous. The real meaning is "aren't you going to respond to this?" Pilate wants Jesus to answer. He has every reason to hear the other side of the story. The Jewish leaders were basically accusing Jesus of being a rebel who was trying to stir up the people to overthrow Rome. Jesus, though, did not have the look of that kind of man. He was calm, resolved, and silent.

Matthew 27:14, NIV: But Jesus made no reply, not even to a single charge--to the great amazement of the governor.

What does Matthew 27:14 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Matthew only records one statement from Jesus to Pilate during this impromptu trial at the governor's headquarters. Pilate had asked if Jesus was the King of the Jews. Jesus said, classically, "You have said so," effectively meaning "yes" (Matthew 27:11–13). While writers such as John include other details of the conversation (John 18:33–38), that was the gist of His response. Beyond that, He had little to say to Pilate. He listened as the Jewish religious leaders reigned down accusations on Him, anything they could think of to get the Roman governor to condemn Jesus. Jesus did not refute or answer even one of the charges, though it's obvious some were simply false.

Pilate was amazed. Why wouldn't this prisoner defend Himself? It was almost like Jesus was ready to be condemned and killed. That, in fact, is exactly the case. Jesus knows that His enemies have abandoned truth to seek His death (John 11:48–53; Matthew 26:59–65). He knows the Gentile governor will eventually choose stability over justice (Matthew 27:24). No further statements would matter —so there's little point in making them (Matthew 7:6).

Matthew 27:15, NIV: Now it was the governor's custom at the festival to release a prisoner chosen by the crowd.

What does Matthew 27:15 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

These events are happening near Passover, a major Jewish holiday (Matthew 26:1–5). This is likely the only reason Pontius Pilate, an infamously cruel and prejudiced Roman governor, is here rather than in his more usual seat of power. Pilate might have been arrogant, but he was not stupid. By this time, he would have already known about Jesus' popularity (Matthew 21:10–11). He can see through the obvious vendetta of the religious leaders (Matthew 27:18). If for no

other reason than to resist being manipulated, he seems committed to having Jesus released, rather than killed.

The following verses show one of the attempts Pilate made to go around the Jewish religious leaders to free Jesus. He would use a custom to give the crowd a chance to call for Jesus' release. Roman law allowed certain leaders to pardon prisoners as they saw fit. The gospels suggest a standing tradition existed in Judea in which the Roman governor would release one prisoner during the Passover celebration. Perhaps the prisoner was selected, at least in part, according to popular opinion. What Pilate does not realize—yet—is that the people present appear to have been brought by Jesus' enemies to present a hostile scene (Matthew 27:20, 24; Mark 15:11, 15).

Matthew 27:16, NIV: At that time they had a well-known prisoner whose name was Jesus Barabbas.

What does Matthew 27:16 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Pilate has been amazed at Jesus' virtual silence in the face of an onslaught of accusations from the Jewish religious leaders (Matthew 27:11–15). Jesus will simply offer no defense, no resistance. Pilate seems to want to release Jesus, however, perhaps because of what he sees in Jesus. Or perhaps he just wants to spite the Jewish leaders. History depicts Pilate as a cruel and relatively condescending politician, who would eventually be removed from his role for inciting unrest. He's no fool, however. He already knows Jesus is popular (Matthew 21:10–11), and this is a personal feud (Matthew 27:18). His discussions with Jesus showed no threat of insurrection (John 18:36). For a variety of reasons, the governor wants to see Jesus released instead of executed.

Every year at Passover, the governor of Judea would release one prisoner in custody. The choice of which prisoner was up to the crowds, or so it seemed. Pilate takes advantage of this to give the crowds a choice. His idea is to offer someone obviously guilty, and distasteful, assuming the gathering crowd will choose Jesus. If so, he can be done with the matter. What Pilate is about to realize is that the crowd assembling at his court is hostile (Matthew 27:20, 24;

Mark 15:11, 15), likely because Jesus' enemies have called them for this purpose.

Matthew mentions another prisoner in custody called Barabbas. Several translations describe Barabbas as "notorious." He was apparently well known, anyway. The other Gospels describe him as an insurrectionist and a murderer (Mark 15:7; Luke 23:19). If he was known for trying to start an uprising against Rome, Barabbas may have been popular with the Jewish people and thought of as a Jewish hero. And yet, in this situation, he was *far more guilty* of what the religious leaders were claiming about Jesus: to be a threat to Roman rule. More than likely, this man was scheduled to be crucified that very day.

Adding intense symbolism to this moment, many manuscripts of Matthew name the guilty prisoner as "Jesus Barabbas," meaning he had the same common given name as Jesus of Nazareth. Pilate is about to offer the people a choice between a Jesus the people *know* is innocent and one they *know* is guilty, and they will choose to reject the Messiah (Matthew 27:21–23). In an almost crass way, the world will reject goodness in favor of someone more to their liking.

Matthew 27:17, NIV: So when the crowd had gathered, Pilate asked them, 'Which one do you want me to release to you: Jesus Barabbas, or Jesus who is called the Messiah?'

What does Matthew 27:17 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Pilate is trying to figure out what to do with Jesus, who has been brought to him by the Jewish religious leaders. They are demanding a death sentence (Matthew 27:11–16). Pilate cannot find anything wrong with Jesus (John 18:33–38), and Jesus won't say much in His own defense. Rather than be blatantly manipulated by a religious feud (Matthew 27:18), Pilate has another idea. Every year at Passover, he releases a prisoner as a kind of gift to the people. Since the religious leaders are claiming Jesus is a rebel against Rome, Pilate will offer a *true* insurgent as an option. Presumably, there'd be no question which was more deserving of release.

The man Pilate suggests as an alternative is a confirmed rebel and murderer (Mark 15:7), so vile that he's described as "notorious" (Matthew 27:16). It's

certain Pilate knew that Jesus of Nazareth had been followed by great numbers of people throughout Israel (Matthew 21:10–11). At the same time, the other prisoner being offered was an insurrectionist who had been convicted of participating in an uprising against Rome. It's possible some thought of him as a hero.

Pilate's alternative is Barabbas, who in some manuscripts is identified as "Jesus Barabbas," meaning he shared the same common given name as Jesus of Nazareth. This creates a potent symbolism in the choice now facing the people. Do they want Jesus the Messiah, or Jesus the Rebel? Jesus the clearly innocent man, or Jesus the fallible, even evil man? The One previously known to be innocent, or a man likely already scheduled for death? Do they want the Truth (John 14:6) who is the Son of God (Matthew 16:15–17), or someone better aligned with their own preferences?

Pilate poses the question to the crowds. His addition of the title "Christ" might be a taunt to the Jewish people. This comes from the Greek *Christos*, itself a translation of the Hebrew term *Mashiyach*, from which we also derive the term "Messiah."

Matthew 27:18, NIV: For he knew it was out of self-interest that they had handed Jesus over to him.

What does Matthew 27:18 mean? [[↑](#) [See verse text](#) [↑](#)]

Pilate is trying to come up with a scheme to release Jesus from custody. At least part of that is common sense: according to this verse, Pilate understood that the Jewish religious leaders were trying to use Roman power to eliminate a rival. Given his existing awareness of Jesus (Matthew 21:10–11) and private interviews (John 18:33–36), Pilate has seen through their false accusations.

On the other hand, Pilate had to be careful. History notes that Pilate habitually antagonized the Jewish people, resulting in several ugly incidents. This was not ideal in the eyes of higher Roman authorities. With a swollen population, and an impending religious holiday (Matthew 27:15), Jerusalem would have been like a fuse waiting to be lit. As Pilate is likely realizing, there is a considerable crowd forming, and they are being manipulated by Jewish religious leaders (Matthew

27:20, 24; Mark 15:11, 15). Adding to the complexity, Jesus' enemies are making claims about insurrection (Luke 23:2). If he appears to be going soft on such crimes, the region could become unstable. Pilate does not want to release Jesus without good cause and risk provoking the powerful chief priests to stir up trouble of their own.

The easiest way out would be if the people themselves, the crowds, would select Jesus as their choice for the prisoner to be released at Passover. Pilate released one every year according to the people's wishes. He could be done with the entire issue if they would call for Jesus. The selection of a "notorious" murderer and rebel (Matthew 27:16; Mark 15:7) is a clear attempt to make the choice obvious.

Matthew 27:19, NIV: While Pilate was sitting on the judge's seat, his wife sent him this message: 'Don't have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him.'

What does Matthew 27:19 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

One of Pilate's hopes was that by giving the crowds an obvious choice between two prisoners, the people themselves would choose to release Jesus. If they agree to keep Barabbas, a "notorious" murderer (Matthew 27:16; Mark 15:7), in prison, Pilate will have averted an incident—and stymied Jerusalem's religious leaders. Pilate certainly knows how popular Jesus had become (Matthew 21:10–11).

From the beginning of this encounter, Pilate has been inclined to release Jesus instead of condemning Him to death. He is not fooled by the Jewish religious leaders and their overt lies. Pilate knows they are using him to eliminate a rival (Matthew 27:24). He doesn't honestly believe Jesus is a threat to Rome (John 18:33–36). And yet, Pilate is in an awkward position. His tenure as governor was marked with violence, something which his Roman superiors did not appreciate. With an impending religious holiday (Matthew 27:15) and swollen crowds, any threat of a riot in Jerusalem is heightened (Matthew 27:20, 24; Mark 15:11, 15).

The Gospels record two other factors that are added into Pilate's hesitation. One comes from the gospel of John and suggests that Jesus claiming to be "Son of

God" may have aroused pagan superstition (John 19:7–9). The fear that Jesus just might be supernatural, or favored by some deity, struck him with fear.

The other incident is depicted here, though we don't know exactly when it occurred during the proceedings. At some point, Pilate receives a message while sitting on the judgment seat. It's from his wife. She has been greatly troubled by a dream. She tells her husband, in effect, to keep away from doing any harm to Jesus of Nazareth. The only details Scripture records are the contents of her message. We cannot say for sure whether this was a supernatural message from God, a coincidence, or something else. We do know that many people of that era, including pagans, took dreams with deadly seriousness.

Regardless of the unknown details, this message only confirms what Pilate is already inclined to do. He wants to release Jesus. And yet, any sense of morality, conscience, or fear of the divine will soon be overwhelmed by Pilate's fear of political trouble (Matthew 27:22–24).

Matthew 27:20, NIV: But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed.

What does Matthew 27:20 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Pilate has offered the people a choice. Every year at the Passover, he releases one prisoner in Roman custody as a sign of good faith to the people (Matthew 27:20). This year, he has given the crowds a choice. This is a calculated decision. One option is Jesus, popular, a healer, and clearly innocent (Matthew 21:10–11; 27:18). The other is Barabbas, the insurrectionist and murderer (Matthew 27:16; Mark 15:7). Pilate's goal is to have Jesus released.

While this seems to be an easy decision, there are factors to consider. Barabbas' participation in an attempt to overthrow Roman rule may have made him a hero to many. The fact that the entire Jewish religious leadership had condemned Jesus may have turned some of His former fans into skeptics. And, so far as this mob was concerned, it was not a neutral issue. The chief priests and elders have quickly gone to work. It's entirely possible that most who arrived at the governor's home in the early morning (Matthew 27:1–2; John 18:28) were specifically invited

by Jesus' enemies. These religious leaders use their influence to persuade the people to ask for the release of Barabbas and the destruction of Jesus, the Son of God.

Matthew 27:21, NIV: Which of the two do you want me to release to you?' asked the governor. 'Barabbas,' they answered.

What does Matthew 27:21 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Pilate has allowed some unspecified time to pass for the message to get out: he will be releasing one prisoner today, either Jesus the teacher or Barabbas the insurrectionist (Matthew 27:15–18). His clear intent is to see Jesus released. Now Pilate asks for a decision. They cry out "Barabbas!" Pilate will seem surprised by this answer. Perhaps he shouldn't have been. Though Jesus was popular with many (Matthew 21:10–11), it's likely that many of those at the governor's headquarters early in the morning were invited there, by Jesus' enemies, for this very purpose.

Even those with little knowledge of Jesus might have been swayed by the accusations of the Sanhedrin (Matthew 27:20). The influential members of Jewish religious leadership wanted them to vote for Barabbas. It's not surprising that many people would side with longstanding priests and leaders, against both Roman occupiers and an accused blasphemer. All the same, it's hypocritical for the people to claim loyalty to Rome (John 19:15) while demanding the release of a confirmed rebel.

Matthew 27:22, NIV: What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called the Messiah?' Pilate asked. They all answered, 'Crucify him!'

What does Matthew 27:22 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Despite Jesus' popularity (Matthew 21:10–11), obvious innocence (Matthew 27:18; John 18:33–36), and comparison to a confirmed murderer (Matthew 27:15–16; Mark 15:7), the crowd has asked to release the convicted man (Matthew 27:17–20). Pilate seems surprised. He seems to have thought that if given the choice, the people would surely want Jesus to be freed instead of killed.

Records from outside the Bible indicate Pilate showed little respect for Jewish religious leaders, let alone the people themselves. Most likely, he underestimated the influence of Jerusalem's priests among the people. Shocked by the cries to release Barabbas, Pilate calls out to ask the people what should be done with Jesus. They shout back, as they have been coached to do by the members of the Sanhedrin, that Jesus should be crucified. This is an especially shocking demand, as crucifixion was purposefully designed to be humiliating and agonizing. John's account of this moment shows Pilate responding with outrage (John 19:6; Matthew 27:23).

Pilate will attempt to ask more questions of the crowd, but you can't have a conversation with a mob. They have made their choice. Pilate's options are dwindling. Jewish religious leaders are taking advantage of Pilate's strained political tenure; the threat of civil unrest will become a deciding factor in the governor's decision (Matthew 27:24).

Matthew 27:23, NIV: 'Why? What crime has he committed?' asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, 'Crucify him!'

What does Matthew 27:23 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

There is little question that Pilate truly wanted to release Jesus. However, he made a fatal mistake when choosing to involve the crowds. It was in his power to simply let Jesus go when he could find nothing legally wrong (John 18:33–36). He did not believe the false accusations of the Jewish religious leaders, and understood they wanted to use political tricks to kill off a rival teacher (Matthew 27:18). This pressure was heightened by Pilate's own poor governorship. Years of disrespect and several ugly incidents of violence likely had his Roman

superiors watching closely. Another major riot would likely result in consequences.

Knowing this, Jerusalem's religious leaders are whipping up a mob to create a tense, hostile scene (Matthew 27:24; Mark 15:11, 15). Instead of simply making the truthful, just call, Pilate tried to avoid being accused of ignoring Israel's leaders by pushing the decision to the people. He underestimated that some might want the rebellious Barabbas released. He failed to consider the pressure applied by Jewish leaders (Matthew 27:20) The crowd had not hesitated to ask for Barabbas and to shout that Jesus should be crucified (Matthew 27:22).

Pilate's response here might be a last-ditch attempt at reason. Of course, it's impossible to reason with a mob. More likely, this is simply an expression of disbelief (John 19:6). What possible reason could there be for someone like Jesus to be given such a brutal, shameful death? Likely coached by the chief priests, the mob simply shouted even louder: crucify Jesus!

It seems unlikely that Jesus could become so unpopular so quickly. Only days before, He was welcomed like a long-awaited Savior (Matthew 21:8–11). Most likely, those present at the governor's estate early in the morning (John 18:28) were there at the invitation of Jesus' enemies. They were likely brought to pressure the governor with the threat of a riot. Some may have even come specifically to advocate for Barabbas and knew little about Jesus. It's also possible that otherwise-neutral people realized their own priests wanted Barabbas, but the Roman governor wanted to release Jesus. Such people would be unlikely to back Rome over their own leaders.

All these count as reasons, but not excuses. Everyone present in that moment owns a measure of responsibility for Jesus' execution. That includes Pilate, the Roman Empire, Judas, and the Jewish religious leaders of the Sanhedrin. As it turns out, it also includes the sins of everyone for whom Christ died (2 Corinthians 5:21; Romans 5:8). Many share the blame for Jesus being sentenced to death.

Matthew 27:24, NIV: When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. 'I am innocent of this man's blood,' he said. 'It is your responsibility!'

What does Matthew 27:24 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

This gesture by the Roman governor is both cowardly, irrational, and cruel. He knows Jesus is innocent (John 18:33–36; Luke 23:13–14). He recognizes the manipulation of Jewish religious leaders (Matthew 27:18). He sees the absurdity of a mob willing to set loose a "notorious" murder instead of a peaceful teacher (Matthew 27:15–16; Mark 15:7). And yet, history notes that Pilate's position as governor was not secure. His harsh, violent acts had resulted in unrest in the past. His superiors had most likely threatened to remove him if there was further chaos. Most likely, the chief priests know this and are whipping the mob into a frenzy, to intimidate the governor into choosing so-called-peace over justice.

In the end, political risks kept Pilate from doing what he knew was right. After attempting to challenge the crowds—in what must have been a shouting match—about choosing to have Barabbas released instead of Jesus, he realized they were on the verge of a full-blown violent mutiny. It wasn't just that they *preferred* Barabbas; the assembled crowd is angrily, aggressively demanding Jesus be sentenced to death.

Pilate gives up and gives in. Condemning an innocent man is already an act of weakness. What he does next is almost embarrassing: trying to dodge responsibility for his own decision. In an act of great theatre, Pilate dramatically washes his hands, symbolizing that he refuses any responsibility for Jesus' death. Even as he signs a death warrant for a truly guiltless man, Pontius Pilate has the nerve to declare *himself* innocent of Jesus' death.

Of course, merely saying "it's not my fault" does not absolve Pilate, in any way. He will give the order for Jesus to be executed. He could have done otherwise—but chose his own comfort and position over upholding justice. His soldiers will carry out that order. He will share the responsibility for Jesus' death with the people in that crowd, everyone else involved, and every other sinner in history whose sins were part of Christ's atonement (2 Corinthians 5:12; Romans 5:8).

For their part, the assembled mob will unthinkingly wave off their own guilt, downplaying the immorality of this scene (Matthew 27:25).

Matthew 27:25, NIV: All the people answered, 'His blood is on us and on our children!'

What does Matthew 27:25 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

This verse is at once terrifying, thoughtless, and sad. It is also *deeply* controversial due to its abuse by those promoting "antisemitism:" a hatred of Jewish people. Given that twisted perspective, and nearly twenty centuries of worldwide persecution of the people of Israel, a modern reader might well wince when reading these words.

Jesus was clearly innocent and declared so multiple times by the Roman governor (John 19:4; Luke 23:4, 22). Still, in response to incitement by religious leaders, an assembled mob demanded Jesus be crucified (Matthew 27:22–23). Pilate, the governor, gave in to that pressure with a laughable attempt to avoid taking responsibility (Matthew 27:24). In response to this, the near-rioting crowd makes a dismissive, careless remark about their willingness to bear that blame.

In some ways, all the people of Israel, not merely those present when Jesus was condemned, have suffered terribly ever since the moment depicted in this Scripture. In 70 AD, Rome would bring slaughter and desecration to Jerusalem. The twenty centuries since have included anti-Jewish persecution on every conceivable scale, up to and including the horrors of the holocaust. Scripture nowhere indicates Israel's historic troubles have been a result of their condemnation of Jesus. However, shortly before being arrested, Christ did predict catastrophic judgment was about to fall (Matthew 23:37–24:2). He will make a similar prediction on His way to the execution site (Luke 23:27–31).

The Bible is clear, however, that God has not abandoned His chosen people (Romans 11:1–2). They are still part of God's plan of salvation (Romans 11:26). Nothing in the Bible—implicitly or explicitly—suggests Jewish people are collectively to be blamed for the death of Christ. No part of Scripture supports hatred, persecution, derision, or prejudice against Israel on account of these events. Matthew records a painfully careless remark shouted by a frenzied mob—this has never been any sort of mandate for future generations to follow.

Matthew 27:26, NIV: Then he released Barabbas to them. But he had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.

What does Matthew 27:26 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

The Jewish religious leaders, and the crowds they incited to call for Jesus' death, have seemingly won (Matthew 27:11–25). Pilate, against clear evidence, his own judgment, and even his wife's dream (Matthew 27:19), has calmed the frenzied crowd by giving the order to release a convicted murderer (Mark 15:7), Barabbas, and for Jesus to be crucified.

Jesus had already been scourged, as noted by John, in another failed effort to play on the crowd's sympathy (John 19:1–5). This was a form of torture itself. Jewish law often considered 40 lashes to be the equivalent of beating someone to death (2 Corinthians 11:24), using a standard whip. The Romans had no stroke limit. The person being punished would be stripped and tied to a post. They would then be beaten by a professional, trained soldier, using a *flagrum*: a multiheaded leather whip braided with weights, bones, metal, hooks, or glass. Aggressive use of a scourge could strip flesh from bone and expose organs. Some scourging victims died from injuries, others from resulting infections. Flogging was sometimes used before crucifixion to weaken the victim but was more often a dire punishment needing no other measures.

Despite the brutality and unfairness, it's important to remember that God's plan is succeeding through all of this (Matthew 16:21; 26:39). The Father sent the Son to the earth to suffer and die as the sacrifice for the sins of humanity (Philippians 2:8). Jesus is quickly moving toward that step, and soon after to resurrection from the dead (John 2:19–22).

Context Summary

Matthew 27:27–31 describes Roman soldiers abusing Jesus inside the governor's headquarters. Most of this mistreatment occurred before His final sentencing, but Matthew continues to group events by theme more than by time. The soldiers strip off Jesus' clothes and dress Him as a mock king. They place a robe on Him, along with a crown made of thorns, and a reed for a scepter. Then the soldiers kneel before Jesus and sarcastically praise Him as the "King of Jews!" Finally, they spit on Jesus and hit Him with the reed before putting His own clothes back on His tattered body and leading Him off to be crucified.

Further details are found in John 19:1–6.

Matthew 27:27, NIV: Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him.

What does Matthew 27:27 mean? [[↑](#) [See verse text](#) [↑](#)]

Pilate's soldiers take Jesus into the courtyard of the governor's headquarters, also known as the Praetorium. All of them gather to participate in mocking Jesus as the King of the Jews. A full battalion of Roman soldiers would have included 600 men at full strength. It's unclear whether that many were stationed there at this time. Given the crowds coming into Jerusalem for Passover (Matthew 26:17), that's entirely possible.

John notes that Jesus was scourged and humiliated before Pilate issued his final sentence (John 19:1–5). Matthew's account, in keeping with his style, seems to arrange Jesus' experiences by theme, instead. So, he details these physical abuses in a single block, continuing through the crucifixion.

That so many soldiers are present in this mockery adds to the list of those who could be held directly responsible for Jesus' torture and death. The list begins with Judas and the Jewish religious leaders. It includes, as well, Pilate, his soldiers, and all the people in the crowd who called for Jesus' crucifixion. On a larger scale, though, those responsible for Jesus' death include everyone who has ever lived. Jesus became the sacrifice for human sin, something of which every person is guilty (Romans 3:23). Everyone who comes to faith in Jesus for the forgiveness of their sin benefits from His death, as well. We would be lost without it.

Even knowing this, it can be difficult to imagine Him being mistreated with such profound cruelty by the vicious Roman soldiers in the following verses.

Matthew 27:28, NIV: They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him,

What does Matthew 27:28 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Matthew has written that all the soldiers in the battalion stationed at the governor's headquarters in Jerusalem have taken Jesus inside. Now they strip off the clothes He is wearing and drape a robe over His shoulders.

Much is made over the gospel accounts alternately describing the cloth as "purple" or as "scarlet" (Mark 15:17; John 19:5), as if this were a contradictory detail. It should be noted that color words can be vague, even in the modern world. Likewise, cultures don't assign individual words to a color unless they consider them notably different. Ancient peoples referred to the sea as "green," when modern people almost universally call the exact same colors "blue." The color "orange," likewise, was depicted as a shade of red or yellow until relatively recently. To ancient eyes, the difference in these terms is no more meaningful than modern debates over whether something is green-blue or blue-green.

Bible scholars suggest the robe was one of those worn by Roman military and civilian officials. The purpose is to dress Jesus in a deliberately silly caricature of a king. By giving Jesus a shoddy version of royal robe and crown, the soldiers can even more thoroughly mock Him for His "crime" of claiming to be the King of the Jews.

Matthew 27:29, [NIV](#): and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand. Then they knelt in front of him and mocked him. 'Hail, king of the Jews!' they said.

What does Matthew 27:29 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

The idea that a battalion of Roman soldiers would come together to so elaborately mock one prisoner may be hard to imagine. And yet, these are Gentiles stationed in a predominately Jewish area, over which Rome has control. Their commander, Pontius Pilate, is noted by history for his cruelty and derision towards Jews. They may well be bored, being stationed in Jerusalem only because it's a major religious holiday for Israel (Matthew 26:17; 27:15). Pilate's act of handing Jesus over to them is almost like throwing a toy in front of a dog.

Taking full advantage of the opportunity, the soldiers have stripped off Jesus' own clothes and have draped a cloak on Him to represent a king's robe. Now they twist together a wreath made of stems with thorns on them, perhaps palm spines or similar. When the crown is complete, they force it down onto Jesus' head. Finally, they put a reed in Jesus' hand to represent a royal scepter to complete the look. The point of the entire cruel joke was to mock Jesus for His "crime" of claiming to be "king of the Jews" (Matthew 27:11). To hammer the joke home, the Roman soldiers kneel before Jesus and sarcastically pretend to honor Him.

Jesus had already been flogged at this point (John 19:1–4). He would have stood before them as a bloody, bleeding mess of a human being, now dressed in a robe and crown and with a scepter. It is remarkable that a Being who could have called for angel soldiers of His own simply refuses to do so (Matthew 26:53–54). He remains resolved to endure any suffering to see His mission through.

Matthew 27:30, NIV: They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again.

What does Matthew 27:30 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

The abuse of Jesus by a battalion of Roman soldiers was not complete even after they had sarcastically hailed Him as King of the Jews (Matthew 27:27–29). After torturing Jesus (John 19:1), they laughed at Him. They piled on more and more mockery. And then they gave Jesus one last beating, hitting the Lord with the reed they'd made Him hold as a mock scepter and spitting on Him. All of this corresponds to Jesus' predictions (Mark 10:34; Luke 18:32).

John's account places this moment ahead of Pilate's final decision to have Jesus crucified. Matthew is, again, grouping his gospel by theme rather than by time. Pilate brings Jesus out before the crowds dressed as a mock-king and presents Him to the people with the words, "Behold the man!" (John 19:4–5). It's likely Pilate hoped that when the people saw a ragged, mutilated, shamed figure, they would decide further cruelty was unneeded. Instead, it only seemed to increase their blood lust (John 19:6).

Matthew 27:31, NIV: After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.

What does Matthew 27:31 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

There is deep irony in how Roman soldiers mocked Jesus. On the surface, they were shaming a prisoner who they assumed had claimed to be King of the Jews (Matthew 27:11). Their jeering and humiliation said, to anyone who might notice, that it was laughable to think about overcoming the might of the Roman empire. Likewise, they are sneering at the culture and history of Israel by defiling their claimed leader.

What the soldiers don't grasp is that they are mocking the true and long-promised King of the Jews. Matthew began this book by establishing the fact that Jesus was, indeed, the rightful heir to the throne of David over Israel (Matthew 1:1–17). The soldiers also do not know that Jesus will one day rule as king of all nations (Isaiah 45:23; Romans 14:11) or that He is the Lord to whom they will answer for their eternal souls (Revelation 20:11–15).

Jesus' most impressive demonstration of power may be His resolve to do nothing in response to this cruel torture and evil mockery. He did not strike back. He did not defend Himself in word or action (Isaiah 53:7). He merely endured to the very limit of His human body, rather than raining down fire on all who disrespected Him (Luke 9:53–55; Matthew 26:53–54). In fact, as He hangs dying on a cross, Jesus will say of these men, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).

Once the soldiers are done humiliating Jesus, they took back the robe and returned Jesus to His own clothes. Normally, prisoners were stripped naked on their way to crucifixion. This would pile on additional shame and make it easier to inflict pain via flogging along the way. Bible scholars speculate the men may have been ordered to put clothes back on Jesus for the sake of the Passover crowds by which He would pass (Matthew 26:17; John 19:19–20). His clothes will be removed once more, however, when He is placed on the cross (John 19:23–24; Matthew 27:35).

Context Summary

Matthew 27:32–44 describes Jesus' march to the cross, aided by a man named Simon of Cyrene. Jesus is offered a numbing, bitter wine, but refuses it, and is nailed to the cross. Soldiers gamble for His clothes. A somewhat sarcastic sign above Him reads "the King of the Jews." Observers, including several Jewish religious leaders, mock Jesus for not being able to save Himself. Even the criminals being executed on either side of Jesus insult Him. Mark 15:20–32, Luke 23:36–43, and John 19:16–27 cover this same process.

Matthew 27:32, NIV: As they were going out, they met a man from Cyrene, named Simon, and they forced him to carry the cross.

What does Matthew 27:32 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

In most cases, Roman crucifixion involved a vertical post permanently attached to the ground. This would make executions much easier and more efficient. Condemned prisoners would typically carry the horizontal crossbeam, which could be nailed to their arms and then attached to the post. Even if the beam was relatively small, it would have weighed around 35 pound, or 16 kilograms. Though Jesus was weakened by that point (John 19:1–4), He apparently managed to carry the beam from Pilate's headquarters (Matthew 27:2) to the city gates. He could not carry it any further, though. The fact that He remained upright at all after the flogging and beatings (Matthew 27:27–31) is remarkable.

The soldiers picked a man coming into the city from the country to carry Jesus' cross for Him. Under Roman law, soldiers could force any subjugated person to carry things for them, for up to a mile. This is part of the background to Jesus' teaching on submission and service for others (Matthew 5:41). Cyrene was a city in North Africa. For this reason, many suppose Simon was of African descent. Cyrene had a large Jewish population, and Simon was very likely in Jerusalem for the Passover, along with so many others. Mark adds that Simon was the father to Alexander and Rufus (Mark 15:21). They may or may not be the Alexander and Rufus mentioned by Paul in Acts 19:33 and Romans 16:13.

Matthew 27:33, NIV: They came to a place called Golgotha (which means 'the place of the skull').

What does Matthew 27:33 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Jesus is being escorted by an execution squad of four Roman soldiers and accompanied by a stranger named Simon, who was forced to carry His crossbeam (Matthew 27:32). Finally, they arrive at the place of the crucifixion. We know little about the exact location of Jesus' death. The location is named "Golgotha," a word referring to a skull, possibly because it was often used for this purpose. The location is visible to many people (John 19:19–20; Matthew 27:39), in keeping with Rome's use of crucifixion as a terrifying warning. In Latin manuscripts, the term was translated using the word *calvaria*, from which the location has come to be called "Calvary" in English.

This spot was certainly outside the ancient city limits. Hebrews 13:11–12 makes a connection between Israel's animal sacrifices for sin, burned outside the camp, and Jesus' crucifixion outside the walls of Jerusalem: "For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy places by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp. So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood."

Scripture's lack of detail over the exact spot of the crucifixion is likely a deliberate choice. Humanity has a habit of idolizing physical things (2 Kings 18:4); sites traditionally associated with Jesus' birth, death, and burial already attract such attention.

Matthew 27:34, NIV: There they offered Jesus wine to drink, mixed with gall; but after tasting it, he refused to drink it.

What does Matthew 27:34 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Matthew provides no detail about the process of the crucifixion itself. Some of that is decency: crucifixion was considered so vile and hateful that it was rarely spoken of directly, or in mixed company. Likely, Matthew's original readers were all too familiar with Roman crucifixion and didn't need Matthew to diagram it for them.

Roman crucifixion was one of the most painful, longest lasting, and shameful ways a person could be killed. It was universally feared by Rome's enemies. It was so terrible that Roman citizens themselves could not be crucified unless specifically ordered to be so by Caesar. It was highly effective in deterring crime and uprisings among the conquered peoples during the time of the Roman empire. The process was at once an act of terror, torture, and cruel precision.

The victim's hands would be nailed to the crossbeam, typically just under the bones of the wrist. In some cases, the palm of the hand would be nailed, but the wrist was a more secure attachment point. Care was taken to pierce nerves and avoid blood vessels, to enhance pain and extend suffering. The crossbeam would then be hoisted onto an upright pole. The feet were nailed in place, using similar care as the hands. The knees would be slightly bent, and the victim's weight would hang entirely on those three points.

This began a slow, excruciating process of suffocation. With outstretched arms being pulled apart, exchanging air in the lungs required the victim to strain against the nails to pull his body up, bringing intense pain. Over time, this became more and more difficult. Eventually, the prisoner simply could not take in any more air and choked to death. Crucifixion victims could linger for hours, or even days, as infection, shock, scavengers, thirst, and blood loss took their toll.

Those dying on the cross would naturally become terribly thirsty. Soldiers would sometimes offer a drink of wine mixed with bitter-tasting myrrh or gall. Scholars speculate this wine mixture was offered as an act of mercy, perhaps by local Jewish women, to dull the pain. Others point to the prophecy in Psalm 69:20–21 to show that there was no comfort on the cross, including in the offer of the wine: "I looked for pity, but there was none, and for comforters, but I found none. They gave me poison for food, and for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink."

Jesus refused to drink this once he realized what it was. He would be in full control of His mind, and under the full agony of His body, for the entire experience.

Matthew 27:35, NIV: When they had crucified him, they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

What does Matthew 27:35 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Victims were almost always crucified naked. Jesus is almost always depicted wearing some minimal clothing in artwork. However, the balance of history and Roman practice suggests He was stripped nude as part of the shame and humiliation of crucifixion. The number of items being dispersed is given as five, in John 19:23–24. This would correspond to an entire outfit, including the undergarment. This, the tunic, seems to have been the subject of the gamble. Rather than tear the cloth, the soldiers each take an item and the last object is assigned by a game of chance.

It's believed that executioners at a crucifixion could take the victim's remaining clothing or personal effects as a bonus payment. The Roman soldiers perfectly and unknowingly fulfilled the prophecy found in Psalm 22:18: "they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots." Luke records Jesus praying for forgiveness for these men (Luke 23:34).

Matthew 27:36, NIV: And sitting down, they kept watch over him there.

What does Matthew 27:36 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

That the soldiers who nailed Jesus to the cross are assigned to "keep watch" is not an unusual part of the process. In fact, this is a necessary aspect of crucifixion. This method of execution was meant to stretch an agonizing death over a long period of time. Crucifixion nails were applied to deliberately avoid major blood vessels, so the victim would suffer filthy, bleeding wounds, but not a quick death. A person taken off the cross not long after being nailed could survive if they were able to fight off infection. Historical records report a rare fraction of victims surviving crucifixion in this way, as difficult as that is to imagine.

This meant that a crucified person, left unattended, could possibly be rescued by friends or family. Matthew adds this detail to counter those who might question the validity of Jesus' death or resurrection. The suggestion that He did not actually die, but was taken down and later appeared, cannot withstand reason. He was under watchful guard all the way through to His final breath. He was never alone or unattended while still alive. John, who was very close to the cross

at the moment of Jesus' death (John 19:25–27), witnessed further details confirming this fact (John 19:31–37).

Matthew 27:37, NIV: Above his head they placed the written charge against him: this is jesus, the king of the jews.

What does Matthew 27:37 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

The charge against the prisoner being crucified was often put on a sign above his head. This ensured that the populace would see the price of such crimes. Crucifixion's entire design was centered around terror, humiliation, pain, and dominance. Merely ending life was not the point; its greatest benefit to Rome was as a deterrent. Hanging mutilated corpses where they could be seen sent a clear message about what happened to those who defied the Empire.

Pilate, as the Roman governor, may or may not have personally written down these charges. Whether that was the case with Jesus, or if Pilate "wrote" this by dictation is irrelevant. Pilate faced an unexpectedly difficult choice of what to write. He openly declared Jesus was innocent of the crimes for which He was accused (Luke 23:4, 14). Once he gave in to mob pressure, however, the governor shifted to focus on the idea of Jesus as a self-appointed King (John 19:14–15).

Matthew's reference to Jesus' crucifixion label was "Jesus, King of the Jews." John further clarifies that Jesus' identity was specified as "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" (John 19:19). Written in three languages, it was meant to be clearly seen and understood. Ironically, this was exactly the truth, published for all who saw it. At the urging of the Jewish religious leaders, Rome had crucified the Christ, the Messiah, the rightful king of Israel.

The phrase "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" translates into Latin as *Iēsus Nazarēnus Rēx Iūdaeōrum*, initialized as I.N.R.I. This shorthand version is often seen in artistic representations of the crucifixion.

Stating that Jesus was Israel's King irritated Jewish religious leaders even further. Pilate might even have chosen this wording out of spite. Those who saw the sign, without knowing all that had happened before, would assume Rome

was crucifying Israel's actual, recognized king. The chief priests hated that and asked Pilate to change it to clarify that Jesus *claimed* that role. Pilate's reply was, "What I have written I have written." (John 19:21–22.)

Matthew 27:38, NIV: Two rebels were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left.

What does Matthew 27:38 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Two men were executed alongside Jesus, one on each side (Matthew 27:31–35; Luke 23:32). The Greek word used for robbers here, *lēstai*, was occasionally used in this era for revolutionaries. Some scholars believe these two men had worked with Barabbas (Luke 23:18) as insurrectionists to overthrow Rome. It's possible the three crosses had been prepared for Barabbas and these two men, and Jesus had taken Barabbas' place in the last-minute switch (Matthew 27:15–23). Other scholars see no reason to read anything else into this Greek word for robbers besides the men being common thieves.

Ultimately, the exact identity of these men is irrelevant. They were criminals, fulfilling the prophecy in Isaiah 53:12 that the Messiah would be put in the same category as criminals. The same verse goes on to say that He "bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for transgressors." Other gospel accounts note that Jesus eventually promised one of these men, who changed his mind and attitude, he would be with Jesus in paradise (Luke 23:43).

Matthew 27:39, NIV: Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads

What does Matthew 27:39 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Crucifixion victims were intentionally subjected to public ridicule. Human beings are naturally drawn to abuse those perceived as weaker, especially if they can accuse the other person of wrong. That habit enabled other public displays of criminals, such as the stocks: locking a person's head and hands into a wooden frame, forcing them to endure laughter and abuse from those who passed by.

Executed persons were usually placed where they could be easily seen (John 19:20). Here, the accusation posted on Jesus' cross (Matthew 27:37) likely brings even more jeering. This naturally occurring torment was part of the humiliation of crucifixion. It is one of many reasons this was considered such a shameful way to die.

Matthew's account echoes fragments from the Psalms which describe the suffering and death of the Messiah:

"All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads" (Psalm 22:7).

"I am an object of scorn to my accusers; when they see me, they wag their heads" (Psalm 109:25).

In this case, to "wag the head" seems to indicate a rude gesture, or a sneering movement of the face. That came along with insults, teasing, and other abuse. Their comments in the following verses show disgust at another supposed Messiah who was not even powerful enough to avoid getting killed, let alone leading the nation in overthrowing Rome.

Opinion about Jesus in Jerusalem was sharply divided (Luke 12:51; John 7:43; 9:16; 10:19). It's true that many people praised Jesus, fewer than seven days prior, during what is now called the triumphal entry (Matthew 21:8–11). And yet, many screamed at Pilate to crucify Jesus until the governor gave in and did as they said (Matthew 27:21–26). It's possible that some loved Jesus while they thought He was going to overthrow Rome, then hated Him when it became clear this was not going to happen. Other might have despised anyone who risked bringing Rome's fury down on them all.

In any case, Jesus was accomplishing in that moment exactly what He had come to do (Philippians 2:8; Matthew 16:21). His willingness to do so (Matthew 26:39) would make it possible for the sins of those who mocked Him to be forgiven (Romans 5:8–11).

Matthew 27:40, NIV: and saying, 'You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!'

What does Matthew 27:40 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Those throwing these insults at Jesus as they walked past His cross (Matthew 27:35–39) likely had no knowledge about Jesus' middle-of-the-night trial before the Sanhedrin. He had been accused there of saying that He would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days (Matthew 26:59–62). They were more likely aware of when Jesus made His actual statement after driving away corrupt businessmen (Matthew 21:12–17; John 2:13–22). John clarifies that Jesus was talking about His own body: they would destroy it, but in three days, He would be resurrected and make that promise true.

Others refer to Jesus' claim to be the Son of God (Matthew 14:43), something He had said in public, but which also came up in His sham trial the night before (Matthew 26:63). The religious leaders who stood by to watch the execution (Matthew 27:41, 43) may have inspired others to point out this irony.

Strikingly, some of Jesus' roadside mockers also use the same basic approach taken by Satan while tempting Jesus in the wilderness. Satan said, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread" (Matthew 4:3) and "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down" (Matthew 4:6). Now those who taunt Jesus on the cross offer the same temptation, "If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross."

How fearsome it would have been if Jesus had suddenly used His power to miraculously revive Himself, come off the cross, and strike down His enemies. Modern readers should be awed by His powers of self-control, in submission to the Father, not to do that (Matthew 26:53–54). His purpose was to make complete God's plan for bringing salvation to all people (Philippians 2:8).

Matthew 27:41, NIV: In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him.

What does Matthew 27:41 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Matthew pictures a parade of mockers walking past the cross and hurling insults at Jesus (Matthew 27:35–40). Some might have been random travelers coming and going from the city (John 19:20). Others could have been those who

recognized Jesus and had never liked His message (John 7:43; 9:16; 10:19). As shown here, some of this abuse was likely encouraged or even inspired by the religious leaders who had conspired to have Jesus executed (John 11:48–53).

Among the local leaders participating in this hate are chief priests, scribes, and elders. All three groups are represented on the Sanhedrin: the Jewish ruling body which condemned Jesus to death (Matthew 26:63–66) and coerced the Roman governor to carry out the execution (Matthew 27:24). Their words are hurtful, echoing the very same approach used by Satan. He had taunted Jesus to prove Himself as the Son of God by using His power contrary to God's will (Matthew 4:1–11).

Their mockery of Jesus takes the form of talking to each other, not directly to Him. They believe they have won, and Jesus has lost. They have come to viciously celebrate the results of their conspiracy (John 11:48–53).

Matthew 27:42, NIV: He saved others,' they said, 'but he can't save himself! He's the king of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him.

What does Matthew 27:42 mean? [[↑](#) [See verse text](#) [↑](#)]

Insults coming from Jewish religious leaders would have been the most galling to hear (Matthew 27:35–41). Of all people in the world, they ought to have known the truth of who Jesus was (John 5:39–40). And yet, not only have they denied His identity as the Messiah, but they condemned Him to death (Matthew 26:63–66). As He hangs mutilated on a cross, they go so far as to mock even the healing miracles He has done in Israel.

Their reference to saving others likely means the countless people Jesus healed from diseases, afflictions, and demon possession. Their meaning is either to dismiss that such miracles happened, or that Jesus' supposed power to heal was not really a sign of divinity. These acts were impossible to deny, however, since so many people saw them take place, including many of the religious leaders themselves (John 11:45–46; Matthew 9:1–8)? These men saw Jesus' benevolent displays of God's power as threats to their own meager power.

These Jewish religious leaders are making light of their lack of faith in Jesus as the King of Israel. They sarcastically claim if He would come down from the cross, they would believe in Him. Given their rejection of prior miracles and other evidence, even that is unlikely (John 5:39–40).

Their use of language is ironic. By not saving Himself from the cross, Jesus is saving many others from their sins (Matthew 26:53–54; Romans 5:19; 2 Corinthians 5:21). Matthew made it clear from the beginning of his book that this is what Jesus came to do: "She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). The Hebrew name *Yeshua*, *Iēsous* in Greek, or *Jesus* in English, literally means "The Lord is Salvation."

A further irony is that because Christ stayed on the cross, faith in Him will become the way for every person to come into a true relationship with God (Philippians 2:8). If He were to rescue Himself, now, to earn the belief of these men, it would undo God's intended plan for sinners to be welcomed into the family of God.

Matthew 27:43, NIV: He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, 'I am the Son of God.'

What does Matthew 27:43 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

In English, the expression "putting on a clinic" means to demonstrate something in a definitive way. The religious leaders who condemned Jesus to death are "putting on a clinic" in cruel mockery. As a mutilated (John 19:1–4), crucified man (Matthew 27:35–38) hangs in agony, they join in viciously insulting and making fun of Him (Matthew 27:39–42). Now they add one more hurtful insult to the list. They joke that if God really wants Jesus, who trusts in Him, then God should save Him now. After all, Jesus claimed to be God's Son.

At this point, the religious leaders are not speaking to Him, they are laughing with each other about Him within His hearing. To them, His dying on the cross is evidence He was never the Messiah He claimed to be. The fact that He can be killed in this way means that His power must have been false. They are patting themselves on the back for convincing Pilate to crucify the man (Matthew 27:24).

We're not told Jesus' emotional reaction to any of these insults. One can assume, though, this one would be especially hurtful. Jesus *is* the Son of God, and He knows that God the Father is the one ultimately responsible for His death on this cross (Matthew 26:39). God the Father is sacrificing God the Son to offer salvation to humanity (Romans 5:19). Jesus even alluded to this when Pilate claimed authority to have Jesus crucified: "You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above" (John 19:11). Isaiah, describing the will of God the Father in this moment, put it this way, "Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief" (Isaiah 53:10).

Jesus is dying on the cross by His own choice and in submission to the will of God the Father. In some impossible to understand way, there is at least a *feeling* of separation between Him and the Father, as He is being crushed, which would have been devastating. Jesus will soon cry out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46).

Matthew 27:44, NIV: In the same way the rebels who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

What does Matthew 27:44 mean? [[↑](#) [See verse text](#) [↑](#)]

Matthew has described the mockery of the crowds and the religious leaders as they pass by Jesus dying on the cross (Matthew 27:35–43). Their insults have a certain internal logic. If someone was truly the Son of God, why would He be so easily killed on a Roman cross? The idea of a sacrificial death is one they have not considered, so the only conclusion they have is that Jesus is not truly the Messiah. Nobody approaching the issue from their perspective could imagine the Son of God would willingly die on a Roman cross to pay for the sins of the world.

A detail given here highlights how ridiculous Jesus' claims must have seemed to His opponents. Even the criminals on either side of Jesus—men at that very moment dying in terrible agony—mocked Him in the same way as the observers. Luke shows one of these men later repented and acknowledged who Jesus was: "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this

man has done nothing wrong...Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom" (Luke 23:40–42). And Jesus did.

Context Summary

Matthew 27:45–56 describes the climactic moment when Jesus dies on the cross. Darkness falls over Israel as Jesus hangs near death. Jesus cries out the words of Psalm 22:1, which mean "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Some nearby think He is calling for Elijah the prophet to come and save Him. Jesus dies. Immediately, the massive temple curtain is torn in two, top to bottom. Earthquakes open the tombs of some of the saints of Israel, who are later resurrected. A Roman centurion is shocked enough to declare that Jesus was the Son of God. Three women, Jesus' friends, watch from a distance.

Matthew 27:45, NIV: From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land.

What does Matthew 27:45 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

In Jewish Scriptures, darkness symbolizes God's judgment or great tragedy. In this case, it represents both. The prophet Amos delivered these words from God to Israel: "'And on that day,' declares the Lord God, 'I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight'" (Amos 8:9). In a similar way, God used a plague of oppressive, three-day darkness in Egypt to communicate His power and judgment against Israel's enemy (Exodus 10:21–23).

As the Son of God hangs on a Roman cross, dying for the sins of humanity, a sudden darkness falls over the land of Israel. The One being judged is Jesus Himself; He suffers the consequence for sins He never committed (Romans 5:18–21; 2 Corinthians 5:21). Commentors speculated about what might have caused the darkness, though conventional explanations don't seem to work. A natural eclipse of the sun is physically impossible near a full moon, as would have been the case close to Passover. No mention is made of clouds, fog, or other obvious weather issues. This is simply "darkness." Whatever mechanism was involved, God brought it about.

Roman time was aligned differently from that of Israel. Roman hours, as in most modern calendars, began at noon and midnight, while Jewish hours typically ran

from the approximate hours of sunrise and sunset: 6 a.m. and p.m. According to Jewish reckoning, then, this darkness lasted from noon until 3 p.m. John's account only indicates that Jesus was brought to Pilate's place of official judgment around "the sixth hour." Many believe John was using the Roman time system, implying that event happened at 6 a.m.

Matthew 27:46, NIV: About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, 'Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?' (which means 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?').

What does Matthew 27:46 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

No mention is made of how those who mocked Jesus while He hung on the cross (Matthew 27:35–44) reacted as unnatural darkness fell over Israel. Did they see in that darkness the hand of God responding to this execution? Were they at all humbled by it? Did they stop speaking, or leave? We don't know for sure since those details are not given.

The darkness ends, though, at about the time Jesus cries out in a loud voice, speaking Aramaic: "*Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?*" This is the first verse of Psalm 22, which has many references connected to the crucifixion. Some believe Jesus is once again declaring how His experience is part of prophecy (Matthew 16:21; 26:53–54). Others note that those words mean, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" That's a heartbreaking cry to hear coming from the Son of God.

Human understanding is necessarily limited when it comes to God's exact nature (Isaiah 55:8–9). Part of that limitation is our vague understanding of the Trinity: God's existence as three Persons in one Being. Also incomprehensible is exactly how God's infinite knowledge and power were limited in His incarnation (John 1:14). We know Jesus experienced human emotion and temptation (Hebrews 4:15). That included intense anguish as He anticipated this moment (Matthew 26:38–44).

We cannot know, for certain, *exactly* what is happening among the Persons of the Trinity at this point. The way Jesus is said to have "cried out" (Mark 15:34) and the reaction of bystanders suggests intense emotion. In some way, beyond our complete understanding, Jesus is experiencing a straining of His connection

to God the Father, as He takes on the sins of mankind (2 Corinthians 5:21; 2 Thessalonians 1:9; Habakkuk 1:13; John 1:29).

Was a sense of "forsakenness" the deepest level of suffering experienced by Jesus? Was this what brought Him such great sorrow in the garden the night before? We can only speculate, taking care not to reach beyond what Scripture actually says (1 Corinthians 4:6).

Matthew 27:47, NIV: When some of those standing there heard this, they said, 'He's calling Elijah.'

What does Matthew 27:47 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Jesus has called out to God in a loud voice: "*Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?*" He apparently spoke in Aramaic, as He usually did. Here He is quoted using a version of the Hebrew name for God, which is "Eloi." He was clearly quoting Psalm 22:1, which says, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:35–46). This was either Jesus quoting the Old Testament to declare its prophesy, or crying out in anguish, or both. What He is experiencing is part of God's ultimate plan (Matthew 26:53–54) but is also agonizing and brutal (Matthew 26:38–44).

Some of those standing nearby misunderstood what Jesus had said. They heard "Eli" and believed Jesus was calling "Elijah" instead of God the Father. It's possible they thought Jesus was calling the powerful prophet Elijah to come and save Him now. Enemies who have been taunting Jesus used that as part of their abuse: that He ought to save Himself, or have God rescue Him, if He really was who He claimed to be.

Matthew 27:48, NIV: Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink.

What does Matthew 27:48 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Three hours of unexplained darkness have passed (Matthew 27:45–47). Jesus has cried out with a loud voice to God the Father. He cited the words of Psalm 22:1, seemingly mourning the feeling that God had abandoned Him. Some nearby misunderstood and thought Jesus was calling for the prophet Elijah to save Him.

Now someone fills a sponge with sour wine and puts it on a reed to hold it up to Jesus to drink. It's not completely clear from the context why they do this. It may have been given in mockery to torment the prisoner more (Luke 23:36). In the immediate context, it's possible that this is offered to try to revive Jesus or help dull His pain. Jesus refused a mixture of wine and gall earlier after tasting it (Matthew 27:34). His initial refusal was likely a deliberate choice to keep His senses, despite the pain. This offering might also be another attempt at ridicule.

There is no explicit indication from Matthew that Jesus drinks the sour wine this time. John, however, indicates that Jesus "receives" it, partly in fulfillment of more prophecies (John 19:28–30; Psalm 69:21). As this happened in the moments prior to His death, Jesus would have had been at no risk of becoming intoxicated.

Matthew 27:49, NIV: The rest said, 'Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to save him.'

What does Matthew 27:49 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Jesus has cried out with a loud voice the words of Psalm 22:1, in Aramaic (Matthew 27:46). His words began with "Eli, Eli," meaning, "My God, my God." Some standing nearby mistakenly thought Jesus was calling "Elijah, Elijah." The prophet Elijah was thought to be the greatest prophet in Israel's long history. He never died and was taken to heaven in a whirlwind (2 Kings 2:1–12). A few people nearby seem to think Jesus calling for Elijah to save Him from the cross. After the sarcastic taunts of those watching Jesus die (Matthew 27:39–44), they may have thought Jesus was trying to call out for rescue.

Someone in the crowd offered Jesus "sour wine," possibly a painkiller or merely a noxious drink (Matthew 27:48). While Jesus refused this earlier (Matthew 27:34),

John's gospel suggests He took some immediately before He died (John 19:28–30). Seconds from death, there would have been no chance of becoming drunk, and this also fulfilled additional prophecies (Psalm 69:21).

Others in the audience object. Whether they try to stop this offering, or not, they wonder if Elijah will really show up and save Jesus in the final moments. In that sense, they express some desire to see Jesus proved a powerful figure, after all.

Matthew 27:50, NIV: And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.

What does Matthew 27:50 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Though He was arrested, maimed, and executed, Jesus' life was not taken from Him. He chose to give it up, beginning with His willingness to be born in human form (Philippians 2:8) and to submit to the will of God (Matthew 26:38–44; 53–54). He consciously chose to arrive at this moment (John 10:17–18). Jesus has fulfilled His mission as He described it to the disciples in Matthew 20:28: "Even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

John notes that Jesus cries out "it is finished," declaring this truth before He dies. He has completed the full task He had been given by the Father. He has submitted to the arrest, the trials, the beatings, the mockery, and the extended execution. Beyond all of that, He has suffered through the three hours of darkness, some sense of being forsaken, and the crushing weight of humanity's sin. The requirements have all been satisfied (Matthew 27:35–49).

The phrasing used here is like that of John, who also describes Jesus' death as a deliberate act of will (John 19:30). In other words, Jesus releases His life from His body. The Son of God is dead.

Matthew 27:51, NIV: At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split

What does Matthew 27:51 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Multiple dramatic events take place at the moment of Jesus' death (Matthew 27:50). The first mentioned by Matthew is that the curtain of the temple is ripped in half, notably said to happen "from top to bottom." This most likely refers to the inner curtain between the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place (Exodus 26:31–33). This separated the area where the high priest, only, could enter, and only once every year. That entry was to make a sacrifice for sin on behalf of the people. Anyone daring to enter God's presence there at any other time would surely die.

The curtain was huge: the height of a six-story building and half as wide, elaborately and thickly woven with seventy-two plaits of twenty-four threads each. This was not something easy to cut, let alone tear. For the curtain to be split in half was remarkable enough. Matthew specifies that this tearing happened from top to bottom. This could only have been done by God.

The meaning ought to have been clear to those religious leaders who saw it happen. Hebrews 9:11 – 10:22 explains in detail how Jesus' death on the cross made it possible for anyone to come to God through faith in Him. Those who come through Jesus can come boldly and without fear right into God's presence. The need for the Jewish sacrificial system that God had given to Israel was done. The perfect and final sacrifice for sin, Jesus Himself, had been made. In both a spiritual and literal sense, the barrier between men and God was removed—by God Himself.

At the same time the curtain was torn in two, earthquakes shook the ground and large rocks broke apart. It must have felt like the earth itself was responding to the death of Jesus.

Matthew 27:52, NIV: and the tombs broke open. The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life.

What does Matthew 27:52 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Several dramatic events took place in the moments following Jesus' death (Matthew 27:50). The temple's massive, thick curtain was ripped in half from the

top down—clearly an act of God (Matthew 27:51). There was an earthquake and rocks were split. Here, Matthew begins to add a detail about disrupted tombs and the bodies of saints who had died. Verses 52 and 53 are only vaguely understood and much debated among Bible scholars. Only Matthew adds this detail to his gospel.

In direct language, this verse indicates that the earthquake caused by Jesus' death breaks open some of the graves holding bodies of "saints." In this context, that would mean god-honoring people from Israel. We aren't given further details on who these people were. They may have been prophets, heroes or simply people notable for their goodness.

Reading this verse together with the next one, it is clarified that the tombs are opened at the time of Jesus' death. More remarkably, according to verse 53, these uncovered bodies were seen alive in the city of Jerusalem after Jesus rose from the dead. A relatively minor point of debate, here, is whether the saints were raised immediately, upon Jesus' death, only going into the city after His resurrection, or whether they were uncovered but did not live again until later.

These two verses are the subject of much greater controversy over the exact meaning—and literalness—of their content. Arguments have been offered that these verses are insertions into the original text. Others suggest this is a purely symbolic reference. Some say they are "not even" symbolic, and the statement is made purely in a poetic sense by Matthew. The most reasonable interpretation, challenging though it may be, is to read these as a straightforward and literal part of the narrative.

Matthew 27:53, NIV: They came out of the tombs after Jesus' resurrection and went into the holy city and appeared to many people.

What does Matthew 27:53 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Several dramatic things happened in the moments following Jesus' death. One was an earthquake that apparently broke open the tombs of many saints who had died in Israel's past (Matthew 27:50–52). The gist of the narrative is that the earthquake disturbed the bodies in some way. After Jesus' resurrection, these saints were seen alive by many people. Whether they came to life at the moment

Jesus died, or were only uncovered, and rose after He rose, Matthew is not explicitly clear. Matthew is the only gospel writer who describes this event, and he does not provide many details. This has frustrated scholars for many centuries, as the event described naturally invites curiosity.

Bible scholars suggest two possibilities for how this may have worked. It's possible these people were resurrected in the same way as Jesus' friend Lazarus. Lazarus returned to a full and healthy human life, not in a glorified body as Jesus did. In other words, Lazarus lived for a time and then died again. If that's what happened with these saints, the "holy city" is Jerusalem, where they appeared to many regular people. Seeing formerly dead saints of Israel would have caused a huge stir after Jesus Himself was resurrected. They likely pointed many people to the power of God through Christ.

The other possibility is that these resurrected souls came back in glorified bodies as Jesus did and went off, after a time, to the "holy city" of heaven. Before leaving, they appeared to many, but when they left, they did not die again and never returned.

Others suggest that Matthew's claims here are poetic, or symbolic, and not meant to be taken as part of the literal narrative. This is an extremely difficult interpretation to support, given that everything else Matthew says in this passage is framed as literal. Another suggestion is that this incident was not part of Matthew's original writing at all, yet there is no textual evidence suggesting it was added.

The most reasonable interpretation is that this is an actual event, which happened as Matthew describes it. Ultimately, we are left with almost no detail or explanation, making it difficult to draw any meaningful conclusions.

Matthew 27:54, NIV: 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!'

What does Matthew 27:54 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Earlier, Matthew noted that Roman soldiers had been tasked with keeping watch over the men on the crosses. This would have been standard procedure. Crucifixion was a slow, horrific process that could take days. To ensure no one attempted to rescue the person before they died, guards would observe, speed up the process, or otherwise confirm death (John 19:31–34). These same men were likely involved in beating, mocking, and tormenting Jesus that same day (Matthew 27:27–31).

Since then, though, an unnatural darkness had come and gone in the middle of the day (Matthew 27:45). Jesus' death was immediately followed by a dramatic earthquake that seemed too connected to be coincidence (Matthew 27:50–51). That combination of eerie events and the odd taunts of the crowd (Matthew 27:40–43) seems to have terrified the attending soldiers. They might fear they are about to experience divine punishment for their involvement.

It's *extremely* unlikely pagan soldiers meant they now believed Jesus was the Jewish Messiah, the Christ. More likely, they were echoing His depiction as "Son of God," which they would have heard from the crowd. The Greek of this verse can also be translated as "a son of God," or "a son of a god." Roman mythology allowed for the idea of demigods and other partially divine beings. Pilate also expressed fear when he heard Jesus associated with this idea (John 19:7–8). In any case, their experiences were deeply humbling, and pulled them towards some level of faith in Jesus (John 12:32).

Matthew 27:55, NIV: Many women were there, watching from a distance. They had followed Jesus from Galilee to care for his needs.

What does Matthew 27:55 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Matthew turns from the reaction of the Roman soldiers after Jesus' death (Matthew 27:50–54) to a group of women standing nearby. They have stayed near enough so that they can witness Jesus' death when the time comes. Now they have seen it, along with the dramatic earthquake that followed it.

These women are familiar friends and parents of Jesus and His disciples. They, too, are from Galilee and have spent much of the last three years travelling with the group, when appropriate, to help care for Jesus and the others. Matthew provides a list of their names in the following verse. John, also, explains those who were nearest to Christ at the moment of His death (John 19:25–27).

What's also interesting is who Matthew does not show standing nearby when Jesus died. None of the disciples are pictured, and only John's gospel indicates that even one of the men are anywhere near the scene. Most are apparently still in hiding (Matthew 26:56) since it would be so dangerous to be captured as one of Jesus' disciples (John 20:19).

Matthew 27:56, NIV: Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of Zebedee's sons.

What does Matthew 27:56 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

A small group of women were standing some distance away from the cross when Jesus died. These are women who had followed Jesus from Galilee and had ministered to or served Him during His travels. Though Matthew does not mention it, another person there is the disciple John, apparently the only member of the Twelve present (John 19:25–27).

Matthew reveals who these women are, and we have met them before. They include Mary Magdalene (Luke 8:2), Mary, the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee (Matthew 20:20). Some Bible scholars speculate that the mother of James and Joseph is, in fact, Jesus' mother Mary. Zebedee's sons are the disciples James and John. Their mother may be a woman named Salome mentioned in Mark's gospel (Mark 15:40). This would match Matthew's list of the women present with the accounts given by Mark and John.

Context Summary

Matthew 27:57–66 describes Jesus' burial and the watch placed over His tomb. Joseph of Arimathea, a wealthy follower of Jesus, asks for Jesus' body. Pilate agrees. Joseph wraps Jesus' body in a clean linen shroud and places it in his

own, never-used tomb, which is cut out of the rock in a garden. Jesus' enemies ask Pilate to place Roman soldiers at the grave site. They seek to prevent anyone from stealing His body and claiming He has been resurrected. Pilate agrees. The tomb is sealed. A guard is posted. These events are also seen in Mark 15:42–47, Luke 23:50–56, and John 19:38–42.

Matthew 27:57, NIV: As evening approached, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who had himself become a disciple of Jesus.

What does Matthew 27:57 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Jesus has died (Matthew 27:50). John's account notes that the attending soldiers made sure Jesus was dead (John 19:34). Sundown is approaching. This will mark the beginning of a Sabbath day. Roman practice was to let crucified bodies rot, enhancing the shame and horror that came with defying Rome. However, Jewish religious law forbids leaving executed bodies out (Deuteronomy 21:22–23). Given the impending religious holiday, the Roman governor seems willing to both speed up the executions (John 19:31) and allow the bodies to be removed.

A wealthy man named Joseph, from the local town of Arimathea, steps forward to claim Jesus' corpse. We know from Luke's gospel that this Joseph was also a member of the Jewish council known as the Sanhedrin. This group condemned Jesus to death. Luke makes it clear, though, that Joseph had not consented to that (Luke 23:50–51). Much like modern legislatures, the Sanhedrin did not need all members to be present to vote, so those sympathetic to Jesus (John 7:50–52) had likely been left out of the midnight trial (Matthew 26:57–68).

In fact, according to John, Joseph was a secret disciple of Jesus because he was afraid of the Jewish religious leaders (John 19:38). Joseph will be bold now, though, to help Jesus and His followers take care of the Lord's body. He will be assisted by Nicodemus, another religious leader whose loyalty to Jesus was less than public (John 3:1; 19:39).

Matthew 27:58, NIV: Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus' body, and Pilate ordered that it be given to him.

What does Matthew 27:58 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Joseph, a wealthy member of the Jewish ruling council, the Sanhedrin, has come forward to help the friends of Jesus deal with His body (Matthew 27:50). Joseph is a secret follower of Jesus (John 19:38) who now decides to act boldly. He goes to Pilate and asks if he can take Jesus' body away now that He has died.

We know from Mark's gospel that Pilate is surprised Jesus is already dead (Mark 15:44). Crucifixions could sometimes last for days; the cruel process was designed with that in mind. The fact that Jesus was viciously flogged and beaten prior to the crucifixion (John 19:1–4) likely made His death much quicker. While Romans often left criminals to rot as a warning, this was an offensive practice to Jews (Deuteronomy 21:22–23). With a major religious feast at hand (John 19:31; Matthew 27:62), Pilate would have no reason not to let the dead be buried immediately.

Pilate confirms with a centurion that Jesus is dead (John 19:31–34) and agrees to give the corpse to Joseph. The gospel writers are careful to clarify, repeatedly, that Jesus was entirely and unmistakably devoid of life. This was meant to combat false rumors that He may have not truly died and was not therefore truly resurrected.

Matthew 27:59, NIV: Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth,

What does Matthew 27:59 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

A rich man from the local town of Arimathea, Joseph is a wealthy member of the influential Sanhedrin. This is the religious council which conspired against Jesus (John 11:48–53) and condemned Jesus to die in an illicit nighttime trial (Matthew 26:57–66). Joseph, however, is a secret disciple of Jesus (John 19:38). As with modern legislatures, the Jewish council did not require every member to be present to hold an official vote. Men suspected of being friendly towards Jesus (John 3:1; 7:50–52) were almost certainly not informed of the sham trial until it was over. He has bravely asked Pilate for permission to take Jesus' body away. Pilate has agreed (Matthew 27:57–58).

Joseph wrapped the body in a new (Mark 15:46), clean burial garment. John's gospel tells us that a man named Nicodemus helped Joseph (John 19:39–42). Nicodemus was a Pharisee who had come to Jesus by night to learn more from Him (John 3) and had attempted to influence the Sanhedrin to treat Him fairly (John 7:50–52). Nicodemus brought a large quantity of burial spices, likely at great personal expense. These were typically wrapped against with the body to mask odor and repel insects.

Jewish burial customs did not include embalming or mummification, but bodies were often anointed with perfumed oil in addition to being wrapped. In Jesus' case, a devoted follower had lavished perfume on Him earlier in the week. This, it turned out, was an anointing of His body prior to death (Matthew 26:6–13).

Matthew 27:60, NIV: and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock. He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away.

What does Matthew 27:60 mean? [[↑](#) [See verse text](#) [↑](#)]

Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Sanhedrin, has been secretly following Jesus (John 19:38). Now, finding a level of courage, he has asked Pilate for Jesus' body. He wants to help to get Jesus buried before the Sabbath begins at sundown (Matthew 27:57–59). He has been helped in this by a Pharisee named Nicodemus, who also spent time with Jesus (John 19:39–40). Together they wrapped Jesus' body with burial spices.

Now Joseph lays Jesus in his own, new, never used tomb which had been cut out of rock in a garden setting (John 19:41). Joseph and Nicodemus are both wealthy men. A new tomb cut into rock, in a lavish location, would have been quite expensive. Also pricey were the burial spices provided by Nicodemus. This fulfills yet another prophecy about Jesus as the Messiah. Isaiah 53:9 says, "They made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death."

Joseph rolls a great stone over the opening of the tomb to seal it and then goes away for the night.

Matthew 27:61, NIV: Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting there opposite the tomb.

What does Matthew 27:61 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Under Roman law, those who were executed could not be mourned in any kind of public way. In normal circumstances, mourning and burial rites could be loud and involve many people from the community. Groups would gather to publicly grieve the death of loved ones. The time of mourning could extend for several days or longer. Wealthy people could afford to hire professional mourners to cry and wail with them during that period to call as much attention as possible to the loss.

None of that was allowed for Jesus. So far as we can tell, only two women were present when Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus laid Jesus' body in Joseph's own tomb and sealed it with a large stone. Mary Magdalene and another Mary, who Mark specifies as "the mother of Joses" (Mark 15:40, 47) sat quietly opposite the tomb and watched. Luke notes that women were there but does not say who they were (Luke 23:55). They now knew where Jesus was buried and planned to return after the Sabbath with more burial spices and ointments for the body (Luke 23:56)

Matthew 27:62, NIV: The next day, the one after Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate.

What does Matthew 27:62 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Jesus' body has been hastily wrapped in a linen shroud with some spices and laid out in a brand-new tomb belonging to Joseph of Arimathea (Matthew 27:57–61). Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses (Mark 15:40, 47) saw where Jesus was buried. They plan to return on Sunday morning, after the Sabbath, to add burial spices and ointments to the body.

Matthew refers to the current day, somewhat awkwardly, as the day after the day of Preparation. The day of Preparation for the Sabbath was Friday, so now it is

Saturday. Some Jewish priests and Pharisees have come to see Pilate once again. Given the outrageous uproar which happened on the prior day (Matthew 27:24), Pilate is likely not happy to see them, or especially interested in their concerns.

However, these men are worried that someone will steal Jesus' body. This would make it easier to claim He has been raised from the dead, making Him a potent symbol for those who resisted either Rome or Jerusalem's leaders. That danger, apparently, will be enough for Pilate to agree to keep an eye on the grave for a few days (Matthew 27:63–66).

Matthew 27:63, NIV: Sir,' they said, 'we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise again.'

What does Matthew 27:63 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Some of the chief priests and Pharisees have come to see Pilate on Saturday, the Sabbath day. From their perspective, they have succeeded in protecting themselves and the people from a false Messiah (John 11:48–53). They were able to illicitly convicted Jesus of blasphemy (Matthew 26:57–68), condemned to death, and crucified by the Romans (Matthew 27:24). Some of them likely saw Him die with their own eyes (Matthew 27:39–43).

As religious leaders, however, these men understand the power of symbols. They want to be sure that not only is Jesus dead, but that everything He stood for is clearly refuted. That includes avoiding any possible deceptions or changes to the claims made about Jesus. They remind the Roman governor that Jesus said He would rise from the dead after three days (John 2:19–22). They do not believe, of course, that this will happen. They are worried that someone will steal the corpse and try to make it look like it has happened.

That possibility, it seems, is enough to convince Pontius Pilate to seal and guard the tomb, for a brief time (Matthew 27:64–66).

Matthew 27:64, NIV: So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the

people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first.'

What does Matthew 27:64 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Jerusalem's religious leaders are worried that Jesus' disciples might continue to tell people He is the Messiah. Even though Jesus is dead (Matthew 27:50), they remember hearing Jesus say He would rise from the dead after three days (John 2:19–22). Their concern is that His followers will steal the body and then go around telling everyone Jesus is alive. The priests and scribes insist such fraud would cause even more problems than would a still-living Jesus.

The Pharisees and priests know it is impossible to crucify someone who is already dead. It's also not possible to persecute a person who exists only in the minds of His followers. They could not reveal a ghost to be an impostor. How could they argue with a false resurrection if there is no body? Their plan is to ask the Roman government to officially seal the tomb and guard it. That will make it secure from any tampering and retain Jesus' body as proof that He was false (Matthew 27:62–63).

Though Pilate is hardly interested in religious squabbles (John 18:29–31), he will recognize the danger and agree to post a guard (Matthew 27:65–66).

Matthew 27:65, *NIV*: 'Take a guard,' Pilate answered. 'Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how.'

What does Matthew 27:65 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Some of the chief priests and Pharisees have come to Pilate to make one more request about the false Messiah Jesus. They know He claimed the ability to rise from the dead after three days (John 2:19–22). They don't believe this, of course. However, they are worried His followers may steal the body and then tell everyone Jesus has been resurrected. How could they fight that fraud once it got started? If the body were simply to go missing, the lie would be harder to refute (Matthew 27:62–64).

Pilate seems to recognize the danger of such an event. His statement of "you have a guard of soldiers" can also be translated as "you may have a guard" or "take a guard." At the same time, he's not likely interested in using any of his own men for a relatively easy task. The Roman soldiers who will watch over Jesus' grave site are likely those already assigned to duty near the temple in Jerusalem. The religious leaders are, most likely, being given permission to reassign those men to Jesus' grave site.

He tells the Jewish religious leaders to do whatever they can to make the location secure. That will include placing a seal on the rock (Matthew 27:60) warning against tampering, as well as having the guards observe the area.

Matthew 27:66, NIV: So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard.

What does Matthew 27:66 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

With official permission from Pilate, the governor, Jewish religious leaders take one more step to destroy Jesus' legacy (Matthew 27:62–65). They go to Jesus' tomb, make sure His body is still inside, and then seal the crypt.

The tomb already has a heavy stone door (Matthew 27:60) which would have kept animals and casual thieves away. To make sure it cannot be secretly opened, they add a seal. This was probably a cord attached to the door and walls, held on by wax stamped with some kind of signet. Further, there will be men there to watch the grave and keep Jesus' disciples away. The guards are likely Roman soldiers normally assigned to security for the city temple.

With these steps, Jewish religious leaders have done all they can to keep Jesus' followers from stealing His body. This, they believe, will eliminate any possibility that His followers can claim He has been raised from the dead (John 2:19–22). The fantastic irony of their efforts, however, will be revealed shortly. All they have done is rule out fraud and theft as explanations for an empty tomb: they have unknowingly added further proof that Jesus Christ did, in fact return from death in a supernatural miracle (Matthew 28:4–7).

