MATTHEW 26-28


Prepared by Dave LeFevre

INTRODUCTION (MATTHEW 26-28)

An outline of Matthew is as follows, with the five sections in the middle each being a pairing of Jesus’ deeds and words.

- **Prologue**—Birth and Infancy (1-2)
- **Proclamation** (3-4); Sermon on the Mount (5-7)
- **Galilean ministry** (8-9); Missionary discourse (10)
- **Opposition** (11-12); Parables (13)
- **Christ and the Church** (14-17); Church life and order (18)
- **Jerusalem** (19-23); Eschatological discourse (24-25)

- **Climax**—Passion, Death, and Resurrection (26-28)

This lesson includes the final climatic section of Matthew’s writing (in bold above).

(Each section also includes related references from other gospels in parentheses and smaller type; thus where there are none, it indicates that the section is unique to that book, though even passages with related references can contain unique elements.)

MATTHEW 26 – THE LAST SUPPER

Jesus taught the disciples many things on Tuesday before retiring back to Bethany for the night. Of his activities on Wednesday we have no record. Perhaps he stayed in Bethany and privately taught the leading disciples. Thursday, however, was the day of the preparation for Passover, and Jesus returned to Jerusalem to spend the Passover meal with friends there. Some of his greatest teachings happened at this meal (most of which will be discussed with John).

While never referred to as the “last supper” in scripture, we call it that because it was the last meal that Jesus enjoyed in mortality. Because the Passover meal started at sunset, we know it was Friday in the Jewish calendar. It was also the last day of Jesus’ mortal life; in less than twenty-four hours, he will be lying in the tomb.

MATTHEW 26:1-5 (MARK 14:1-2; LUKE 22:1-2) – RULERS PLOT JESUS’ DEATH

26:1 **Jesus had finished all these sayings.** As he did at the end of each of the other four discourses, Matthew concludes the fifth discourse (Matthew 25-26) with a summary phrase. The difference here is that it includes the word “all,” since it is the concluding sermon of the entire book.

26:2 **After two days.** Meaning that the Passover feast starts in two days. It was Tuesday and the feast started with the killing of the lamb on Thursday afternoon, with the Passover meal Thursday evening (Friday by their calendar) after sunset.

26:3 **Caiaphas.** The current high priest is here mentioned in Matthew for the first time. He was high priest from A.D. 18-36, much longer than most other high priests during this time (there were twenty-five high priests between Caiaphas and the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70), and attesting to his close relationship with Pontius Pilate, the Roman prefect over Palestine. In fact, Pilate and Caiaphas were both removed from office by Vitiellus, the Syrian governor, underscoring their partnership in governing the Jews. In 1990, an ossuary (bone box, used to collect the bones after the flesh had decayed from the body) labeled with
the name of Caiaphas, was discovered just south of Jerusalem. It is likely that of this very man and included not only his bones but those of several family members.

26:4 and kill him. The JST (the first draft, not the final version of the New Testament) adds at the end of the verse, “...and kill him, that they might put an end to his work.” This gives at least a basic reason why they opposed Jesus—his work of teaching, healing, and proclaiming the gospel threatened their established way of doing things and the peace they so tenuously had negotiated with the Romans over the years.

26:5 lest there be an uproar among the people. The Jewish leaders not only feared that they would have difficulty taking Jesus with a crowd around, but that a riot might break out which would bring the Roman army down upon them, as had happened in the past. Many Jews came to Jerusalem each year for Passover, estimates ranging anywhere from 85,000 up to a million. To help avoid problems, the Romans moved hundreds of soldiers to Jerusalem during this time also, and the governor typically came from his home in Caesarea to stay at the Antonia Fortress next to the temple.

MATTHEW 25:6-13 (MARK 14:3-9) – JESUS ANOINTED

26:6 in the house of Simon. Though Jesus was staying at the home of Lazarus, Mary, and Martha in Bethany, he accepted a dinner invitation at the house of Simon, a former leper who was probably healed by Jesus.

26:7 an alabaster box of very precious ointment. It was common to pour a small amount of fragrant oil on an honored guest’s head as an honor and to make the meal more pleasant by the odor. In this case, however, the woman (who is Mary in John’s gospel) pours a significant amount of nard oil (extracted from the root of the plant by that name) on him.

26:10 she hath wrought a good work. The disciples saw the woman's act as a huge waste—indeed, it probably was worth about $12,000, by one estimate. Jesus is not minimizing the ongoing needs of the poor but justifying her singular act, coming as it did at this critical time in his life.

26:12 she did it for my burial. When he was buried later, it was done in such haste that there was no time for an anointing of the body. This is the only anointing he would receive before he was resurrected.

26:13 this woman. The JST adds at the beginning of the verse, “And in this thing that she hath done, she shall be blessed; for verily I say unto you...”

MATTHEW 26:14-16 (MARK 14:10-11; LUKE 22:3-6) – JUDAS AGREES TO BETRAY JESUS

26:15 thirty pieces of silver. Though no coin is mentioned, it is probably the stater, equal to four denarii, totaling about four months' wages. The amount was prophesied in Zechariah 11:12 and was the Mosaic amount owed to the owner of a slave gored by an ox (Exodus 21:32). Judas’ question in Matthew betrays his interest in money: “What will ye give me?”


This section will be discussed with Luke.


This section will be discussed with Luke.


26:22 Is it I? How easy it would have been for them to point the finger at others. But instead, these men, hand-chosen by the Savior, showed their humility and desire to improve by asking, “Is it I?” When things are bad, when there are problems, when there has been a wrong committed, can we take this attitude instead of jumping to judgment against another: ‘It is I, Lord? How can I improve? What can I do differently?’

26:23 He that dippeth his hand with me. Jesus proposed that his betrayer is one who was close by, even at the same table, sharing the bowl with him. Mark adds the declaration that “It is one of the twelve.” Both of these statements provide subtle hints that the last supper included others besides the Twelve. The information in these verses would be useless if only he
and the Twelve were eating the meal together. Instead, his response narrowed the list of suspects from everyone in the room to just his closest associates, but would not have identified Judas individually.

26:25 Master, is it I? Judas had already agreed to betray Jesus and Jesus, with divine foresight, also knew he had done it. By asking this question, Judas showed his brazen pride. When Jesus answered, “Thou has said,” he showed that he will proceed with the Father’s plan in full knowledge of Judas’ actions.

MATTHEW 26:26-29 (MARK 14:22-25; LUKE 22:19-20)
– THE SACRAMENT

26:26 Take, eat; this is my body. This incident not only installs the sacrament as a gospel ordinance, but served as a prophecy through a symbolic act, as Jesus used the bread and wine to represent his body and blood which would shortly be bruised, broken, and spilled, all for the benefit of those eating those symbols at this meal—and everyone else. The first chronological mention (in terms of when it was written) of the sacrament is found in 1 Corinthians 11:23-25, given that Paul seems to have written that letter before these gospels were recorded.

26:26 Take, eat. The JST makes the tie of the new ordinance to the Atonement more clear: “Take, eat; this is in remembrance of my body, which I gave a ransom for you.”

26:27 Drink ye all of it. The disciples were to symbolically drink every last drop of the wine, representing the total sacrifice that Jesus would spill in our behalf. Note that the JST changes the wording slightly, putting the emphasis on everyone present drinking of the wine: “...Drink of it all of you.”

26:28 The new testament. The new covenant that Jesus instituted by his Atonement as he fulfilled the Law of Moses. Matthew would not have called this meal the ‘last supper’; instead, he emphasized the beginning of the new era implemented by Jesus the Messiah.

26:28 shed for many. Like the bread, the JST slightly changes the language on the wine, tying it clearly to the Atonement: “For this is in remembrance of my blood of the new testament, which is shed for as many as shall believe on my name, for the remission of their sins.”

26:29 But I say unto you. The JST adds a lengthy section at the beginning of this verse, making the administration of the sacrament a priesthood duty to the early disciples and linking it to their testimonies of him: “And I give unto you a commandment, that ye shall observe to do the things which ye had seen me do, and bear record of me even unto the end. But I say unto you...”

26:29 drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom. A reference to the great judgmental feast (“the marriage supper of the Lamb”) that will be hosted by the Lord for the faithful. See Revelation 19:9.

MATTHEW 26:30-35 (MARK 14:27-31; LUKE 22:31-38; JOHN 13:36-38) – PROPHECY OF DISCIPLES SCATTERING, PETER’S DENIAL

26:30 sung an hymn. This was likely Psalms 113-118, the Hallel or praise song that was typically sung with the Passover meal.

26:31 smite the shepherd. The scripture quoted is Zechariah 13:7, “smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered.”

26:33 yet will I never be offended. Greek skandalizo, ‘scandalized,’ also meaning to impede progress, to make another trip or fall, or to entice to sin. This is the same root word Jesus used about Peter (translated “offence” in Matthew 16:23) after the apostle tried to tell Jesus that he was not going to die. In both cases, Peter was fighting against a prophecy, resisting the divine Word.

26:34 before the cock crow. Countering Peter’s ardent declaration, Jesus quietly predicts a very different outcome for Peter.

MATTHEW 27-28 – THE PASSION

The Last Supper and the final teachings of Jesus were concluded. The group left the upper room in Jerusalem and made their way under the light of a full moon of the Passover night out of the city, across the Kidron Valley,
began the Passion of the Lord; here he was arrested, and from here his mortal ministry and life came to an end. In three days, this darkest hour gave way to the most glorious light imaginable. But on this night, it was only darkness, fear, and confusion for the little band of loyal disciples of the carpenter of Nazareth.

The events from Gethsemane to the tomb are often called the “Passion.” This is a term not often used in the LDS Church, but it comes from the KJV translation in Acts 1:3: “To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion.” The original word there in Greek is paschô, meaning ‘to be affected’, ‘to undergo an experience’, or ‘to suffer.’ The KJV translators chose the word “passion” because the Vulgate (the Latin translation made by Jerome and used by the Catholic Church for hundreds of years) uses passio in Latin (Wycliffe and Tyndale actually used it first, and the KJV team adopted the word from them). Note that the JST changes the term “passion” to “sufferings,” the more accurate word choice. All of the gospels cover the Passion, but each offers a slightly different view. Thus it is enlightening to consider what each offers us individually, especially in light of what we can surmise of the author’s intent, purpose, and audience. That is what we’ll do for each of these books.

Scholars have long and great debates about the differences in the four gospels, but particularly about the Passion narratives. Over the years they have developed elaborate (and even contradictory) explanations that involve theoretical sources and interdependencies (such as the commonly accepted but hypothetical “Q” behind the Matthew and Luke accounting for the similarities between them that are not in Mark). Which one they select usually depends on their views about Jesus himself. The majority of scholars today accept that Jesus is actually the Son of God, the Messiah, and the Savior of mankind. Rather, they see the “real” Jesus as a benign, itinerant preacher who had no significant following in life, was executed by the Romans for sedition, and whose followers persuasively built a church from the core of his thoughts into what we now see as Christianity. In their views, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were written by late first or even second century authors (and certainly not the actual men named Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John) based on oral and written traditions developed in independent areas of Christian growth. Thus the differences are reflective of the beliefs of these separate groups as Christianity matured and determined what it would be.

These scholars demonstrate the fulfillment of Jesus’ words: they strain at a gnat and swallow a camel. They work so hard to prove their own theories that they overlook that the simplest explanation is the most likely: eyewitnesses of the same event, writing several years after the fact, remembered it slightly differently from each other. Latter-day Saints believe in the historicity and veracity of the NT because they have other witnesses of Jesus, his words, his mission, and God’s plan of salvation for his children. The Book of Mormon, the Doctrine & Covenants, the Pearl of Great Price, and the Joseph Smith Translation all refute the doctrines of men mingled with scripture and cry out as other witnesses that the Bible is true (see 1 Nephi 13:39-41), that the men who wrote the New Testament were not apologists for a new fabricated religion but ordained representatives of God. Nowhere is this more evident than in the Passion narratives that describe the atonement of Jesus at Gethsemane, Golgotha, and the Garden Tomb.

I’m grateful for the historical, linguistic, and cultural insights many scholars provide. I study them because I gain insight into the meaning of the words and the events behind the stories. But I use their works cautiously when it comes to doctrine and gospel truths, because I know many of them don’t share my beliefs or my testimony. To many of them, it is just their job and the New Testament is just a text to study in a scholarly way. But to me, it’s a record of my Savior’s life and the people who choose to follow him, and thus sacred information. I can learn from the scholars, but I learn more—or at least things that are more important—from the Spirit as it touches my soul and speaks truth.

**MATTHEW 26:36-45 (MARK 14:32-41; LUKE 22:40-46; JOHN 18:1) – GETHSEMANE**

26:36 Gethsemane. From the Aramaic term meaning ‘oil press.’ Matthew and Mark call it this while Luke just says they went to the Mount of Olives. From John we learn it was a garden (though in the JST of Mark 14:32, it adds that it is a garden), so from the combination, today we call it the Garden of Gethsemane. Guides show tourists olive trees and a press on the lower slope of the Mount that could date from shortly after the time of Christ (Titus cut down all the trees in the siege of Jerusalem in A.D. 70), though the exact location of Jesus’
experience on this night cannot be known. There are several caves in the area that some believe were used by the sleeping disciples.

26:38 *exceeding sorrowful, even unto death.* Andrew Skinner reminds us that Jesus’ atonement was infinite (see 2 Nephi 9:7 and Alma 34:12), meaning it was for all sin, suffering, pain, and illness (Alma 7:11-14), and not just those billions of souls here on this earth, but for every world within God’s universe (D&C 76:24, 41-42 and Moses 1:31-33). For the first time, Jesus was experiencing the results of sin—not his own, for he had none, but the sins of every soul in the universe! No wonder he was ‘overcome with sorrow as to cause his death.’ (see Andrew Skinner, *Gethsemane*, 49-65).

26:39 *fell on his face.* In that day, most prayers were offered standing, but prayers offered in the greatest humility or distress were offered prostrate.

26:39 *let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.* Elder Jeffrey R. Holland said, “I wish to thank not only the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ but also His true Father, our spiritual Father and God, who, by accepting the sacrifice of His firstborn, perfect Son, blessed all of His children in those hours of atonement and redemption. Never more than at Easter time is there so much meaning in that declaration from John the Beloved, which praises the Father as well as the Son: ‘For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

“I am a father, inadequate to be sure, but I cannot comprehend the burden it must have been for God in His heaven to witness the deep suffering and Crucifixion of His Beloved Son in such a manner. His very impulse and instinct must have been to stop it, to send angels to intervene—but He did not intercede. He endured what He saw because it was the only way that a saving, vicarious payment could be made for the sins of all His other children from Adam and Eve to the end of the world. I am eternally grateful for a perfect Father and His perfect Son, neither of whom shrank from the bitter cup nor forsook the rest of us who are imperfect, who fall short and stumble, who too often miss the mark” (*Ensign*, May 1999).

26:40 *could ye not watch.* Though addressing Peter, he was speaking to all the disciples, as illustrated by the second person plural verb form.

26:40 *watch with me one hour.* In both verses 40 and 41, “watch” is the Greek *gregoreuō*, meaning ‘be alert’ or ‘stay awake.’ It also has the connotation of being vigilant and cautious. At this late hour, at night, after a large Passover meal including several cups of wine, it was probably very challenging for the disciples to stay awake, watch alertly, and pray.

26:44 *prayed the third time.* In Gethsemane, Jesus went off and prayed alone three times asking the disciples to stay awake and watch, which they could not do. After the third time, he simply let them sleep until Judas and his party came. In another contrasting account in 3 Nephi, Jesus counseled his disciples with the same language of the New Testament, “ye must watch and pray always” (3 Nephi 18:15). The next day, Jesus returned and commanded them to all pray, which they did (3 Nephi 19:16-17). As in Gethsemane, three times he went off alone to pray to the Father. Each time he returned to find them continuing to pray mightily. After the third time, he told them, “So great faith have I never seen among all the Jews; wherefore I could not show unto them so great miracles, because of their unbelief. Verily I say unto you, there are none of them that have seen so great things as ye have seen; neither have they heard so great things as ye have heard” (3 Nephi 19:35-36). The similarities and contrasts between the two experiences are meant to teach us all the power of humble and consistent prayer.

26:45 *the hour is at hand.* The miracle of Gethsemane is not captured in the understatement of the event in the gospel accounts. It is only through latter-day teachings that we have a glimpse of the critical nature of this part of the atonement. Indeed, it is correct to say that because of modern scripture and the teachings of the prophets today, the Mormon view of Gethsemane is completely different from that of the rest of the world. Outside of the Church, Gethsemane is at best a prayerful moment of self-examination before proceeding on to the real challenge, the cross. In some opinions, Gethsemane even shows the humanity and frailty of Jesus. But the truth is far beyond either of these limited and incorrect perspectives. Gethsemane was as critical to the plan of salvation as any other event of that day, and perhaps even more. Said one scholar, “Without Gethsemane in God’s eternal plan, everything else would have been a colossal waste—*everything*” (Skinner, *Gethsemane*, 5).

James Talmage: “Christ’s agony in the garden is unfathomable by the finite mind, both as to intensity
and cause. The thought that He suffered through fear of death is untenable. Death to Him was preliminary to resurrection and triumphal return to the Father from whom He had come, and to a state of glory even beyond what He had before possessed; and, moreover, it was within His power to lay down His life voluntarily. (John 5:26-27; John 10:17-18.) He struggled and groaned under a burden such as no other being who has lived on earth might even conceive as possible. It was not physical pain, nor mental anguish alone, that caused Him to suffer such torture as to produce an extrusion of blood from every pore; but a spiritual agony of soul such as only God was capable of experiencing. No other man, however great his powers of physical or mental endurance, could have suffered so; for his human organism would have succumbed, and syncope would have produced unconsciousness and welcome oblivion. In that hour of anguish Christ met and overcame all the horrors that Satan, “the prince of this world” could inflict. The frightful struggle incident to the temptations immediately following the Lord’s baptism was surpassed and overshadowed by this supreme contest with the powers of evil.

“In some manner, actual and terribly real though to man incomprehensible, the Savior took upon Himself the burden of the sins of mankind from Adam to the end of the world. Modern revelation assists us to a partial understanding of the awful experience. In March 1830, the glorified Lord, Jesus Christ, thus spake: “For behold, I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent, but if they would not repent, they must suffer even as I, which suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit: and would that I might not drink the bitter cup and shrink—nevertheless, glory be to the Father, and I partook and finished my preparations unto the children of men” (Jesus the Christ, pp. 613-14).

Robert Millet: “The night of atonement was a night of irony. He who was sinless became, as it were, the great Sinner. In Paul’s words, God the Father had “made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin” (2 Cor. 5:21). To the Galatian Saints, Paul also taught that “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us” (Gal. 3:13). He who deserved least of all to suffer now suffered most—more than mortal mind can fathom. He who had brought life—the more abundant life (John 10:10)—was subjected to the powers of death and darkness. As the Prophet Joseph Smith taught the brethren of the School of the Prophets, Jesus Christ is called the Son of God because he “descended in suffering below that which man can suffer; or, in other words, suffered greater sufferings, and was exposed to more powerful contradictions than any man can be” (Jackson & Millet, Studies in Scripture, Vol. 5, The Gospels, 436).

26:46 **Rise, let us be going.** The KJV makes the time between Jesus' telling them to “sleep on” and “Rise, let us be going” sound very short. The JST makes clear the passage of some amount of time by adding, “And after they had slept, he said unto them, Arise...” The image is compelling. The exhausted but triumphant Jesus sat, having defeated sin and Satan, alone in the dark and cool night air. He looked on at his sleeping disciples, those who had not been able to stay awake while he labored for their benefit, but for whom he felt only love, letting them sleep and waiting for the next step in his atoning process, while across the valley, Judas and his little army were approaching.


26:47 **swords and staves.** Roman soldiers assigned by Pilate to accompany the group would have brought the swords, and the temple police assigned by Caiaphas and the chief priests (Saducees) would have carried the staves—wooden clubs or staffs.

26:49 **kissed him.** There are at least two possible meanings. First, it was insulting for Judas to betray Jesus with a kiss, which was equivalent to proclaiming that he, Judas, was in full fellowship with the Master. Second, the kiss was a symbol of peace between people, and Judas ironically used it to start the violence that would lead to Jesus’ death.

26:50 **Friend, wherefore art thou come?** The JST replaces “Friend” with “Judas.” Jesus reserves the title ‘friend’ for those who do his will and keep his commandments (e.g., D&C 84:77).

26:53 **twelve legions of angels?** A legion was about 6,000, so twelve legions would be about 72,000 angels, a vast number that could have defeated any force assembled against Jesus (of course, just one angel could defeat any mortal army; compare Isaiah 37:36).

This section will be discussed with John.


This section will be discussed with Mark.

MATTHEW 27:1 (MARK 15:1A; LUKE 22:66-71) – TRIAL BEFORE THE COUNCIL

This section will be discussed with Luke.

MATTHEW 27:3-10 – JUDAS’ SUICIDE

27:4 see thou to that. The final part of the verse is changed in the JST, increasing the disdain the Jewish leaders have for Judas: “...What is that to us? See thou to that it; they sins be upon thee.”

27:5 and hanged himself. The other gospels don’t record this story, though Luke mentions it in Acts 1:16-20. The accounts are slightly different in the KJV—in Matthew, Judas hanged himself but in Acts he fell and “burst asunder.” In the JST version of Matthew’s account, Judas hanged himself but apparently the rope or the tree branch he used broke, harmonizing both accounts: “...and hanged himself on a tree. And straightway he fell down, and his bowels gushed out, and he died.”

27:10 And gave them. JST changes at the beginning and end of this verse clarify what the Jewish leaders did with the money and enhance Matthew’s quotation of the Old Testament: “And therefore they took the pieces of silver, and gave them for the potter’s field, as the Lord appointed me by the mouth of Jeremy.”

MATTHEW 27:2, 11-14 (MARK 15:1B-5; LUKE 23:1-7; JOHN 18:28-38) – FIRST APPEARANCE BEFORE PILATE

This section will be discussed with John.


27:15 want to release unto the people a prisoner. This incident is only mentioned in the Bible, not in any Roman records, but the practice of releasing certain prisoners on public holidays was common. It helped created goodwill with the people.

27:16 Barabbas. The word means ‘son of the father,’ showing that it is perhaps more a title than a name. The oldest manuscripts of the New Testament give his name as Jesus (Jesus in Greek). So the people were being asked to choose between Jesus son of the father and Jesus Son of the Father.

27:17 Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas is not known outside of the New Testament text. But Matthew called him “a notable prisoner” (27:16) and John “a robber” (John 18:40). Such robbers were often those who worked to upset the rule of Rome and its sympathizers (typically the wealthier Jews) by committing crimes against those people (see Mark 15:7 and Luke 23:19, where his specific crimes are insurrection and murder). The two men crucified with Jesus had the same title. If that was Barabbas’ crime, then Jesus’ rejection by at least some of the crowd may have been because Jesus did not fight the Romans, as the Messiah was generally expected to do, and Barabbas did.

27:18 for envy they had delivered him. Pilate knew that the Jewish leaders delivered Jesus to him for judgment because of envy or jealousy. They did not like how popular he was with the people and how bad he made them all look by comparison.

27:19 his wife sent unto him. Dreams have been important in many parts of Matthew’s story, even dreams by non-Jews (such as the magi). Pilate’s wife’s dream (or “vision,” as the JST says) and warning to him went unheeded, but tradition is that Pilate’s career suffered as a result of his encounter with Jesus. Matthew alone records this event.

27:22 Let him be crucified. In Mark’s account, the JST has the crowd say, “Deliver him unto us to be crucified. Away with him. Crucify him” (JST Mark 15:15). This is a mocking statement by the crowd, as if they are saying to Pilate, ’If you are too scared to crucify him, give him to us, and we’ll do the job ourselves.’ They
27:24 washed his hands. Seeing that he could not convince the people but rather than he nearly had a riot building, Pilate symbolically washed his hands—not cleansing himself from any sin but rather publicly declaring his personal innocence in the decision and putting it on the people—“see ye to it.” Of course, he then ordered Jesus’ death, so he clearly was as guilty as anyone, if not more. Matthew is the only one to mention this hand-washing episode.

27:26 when he had scourged Jesus. Scourging or flogging was the Roman practice of punishment before crucifixion. The practice was to take a leather strap with several strands, each of which contained several sharp fragments of bone or iron, and beat the person across the back and shoulders. The flagellum would tear the skin terribly, sometimes displaying bone, muscle, and even intestine, and it was not uncommon for the person to die during the flogging, thus negating the need to continue the crucifixion.

27:27 the whole band. Up to 600 soldiers were stationed at the Antonia Fortress. This was public humiliation. The soldiers were known to play a game with prisoners, somewhat like a board game today. They would put a robe on the prisoner and call him king, hitting him with sticks and hands, all the while rolling dice and moving the prisoner around like some kind of game piece on a ‘game board’ etched on the floor.

27:29 mocked him. Even though it was not one of the many occasions when Matthew called upon an Old Testament quotation, his recitation of what happened to Jesus at the hands of the Romans after being flogged would remind his readers of Isaiah 50:6: “I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting.” The punishment not only mocked Jesus but all Jews, for by their treatment of him, they showed the Jews how they would treat anyone who proclaimed himself king instead of Rome.

MATTHEW 27:31-32 (MARK 15:20-21; LUKE 23:26-32; JOHN 19:16B-17A) – LED TO GOLGOTHA

This section will be discussed with Luke.


Each of the four witnesses of Jesus’ death and resurrection tell the story from their own perspective. It is valuable to look at each one individually and learn what they each have to say. This lesson explores the experience from Matthew’s perspective.

27:33 Golgotha...a place of a skull. All four gospels give the location of the crucifixion as ‘skull.’ We also call it Calvary because of the Latin translation of this term, calvaria, which means skull (and which the KJV translators used in Luke to translate the Greek kranion, meaning ‘skull’). The JST changes the translation here to “a place of a skull burial” (also in Mark and John but leaves Luke as “Calvary”).

27:35 And they crucified him. In the day when the gospels were written, that’s all they had to say. All of their readers knew what crucifixion was, how it killed a person, and what it was used for. Today we read about it in books and—gratefully—have probably never seen it happen to anyone.

Crucifixion was a most cruel form of death. Weak from being flogged and other punishments, and from carrying the crossbeam to the location outside the city walls, the victim was stripped of all clothing to increase humiliation, then fastened to the crossbeam with ropes, nails, or both. If nailed, the spikes were driven both through the palms and the wrists, as the palms alone could not support the weight of the body. The upright post was already in place, so the soldiers lifted up the crossbeam with forked sticks and set it in place on top of or in a notch of the post. Most crosses were about 7 feet high, not as high as is sometimes portrayed in art. There were at least three types of crosses, some shaped like a small T, some like a large T, and others like an X. We don’t know which one Jesus was on, but probably one of the “T” shapes. Sometimes crosses were built in groups with a type of scaffolding behind them to make it easy to get to the victims.
Some crosses had a small piece of wood under the buttocks for the person to sit on to a degree, and some a small board under the feet for the same purpose. Most of the time, however, the feet were nailed to the cross (even when the hands were tied) through the ankle or heel bone into the side of the upright post. One such victim’s bones (a man named Jehohanan—John) were discovered in a tomb in Jerusalem in 1968, the iron spike still in the right heel (because the nail hit a knot in the wood and bent, so they couldn’t easily remove it).

When there were multiple persons crucified, it was the custom to put the most notorious or famous in the middle.

Death occurred after severe blood loss, exposure, and exhaustion, which triggered heart failure, brain damage, suffocation, and shock. As the victim hung from his arms, his chest muscles tightened and had spasms, making breathing very difficult, so he lifted himself on his feet to relieve the pressure. But soon the pain in the legs became too great, and he would transfer his weight back to his arms, starting the cycle over again. It’s easy to understand that our English word ‘excruciating’ comes the Latin term *excruciatus*, meaning ‘out of the cross.’

Many Christians today wear a cross or otherwise use it as a symbol of Jesus. First century Christians did not and would not have done that, just as we would not wear a small electric chair around our necks to remind us of someone killed in that manner. To them, crucifixion was simply the method of Jesus’ death, and an abhorrent one at that. Over the years it has come to stand for Jesus and his sacrifice for us, and though we don’t use it in the LDS Church (since we focus on the victory, not the death), we can respect and understand what the symbol means.

27:35 *parted his garments, casting lots.* Matthew saw this as a fulfillment of Psalm 22:18, which reads, “They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture.” More details about this in John’s account.

27:37 *his accusation, written.* In the JST, Matthew (and Mark) are like KJV John that they explain that Pilate wrote the sign on the cross and that the chief priests asked him to change it, but he refused: "And Pilate wrote a title, and put it on the cross, and the writing was, Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews, in letters of Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew. And the chief priests said unto Pilate, It should be written and set up over his head his accusation written, This is he that said he was Jesus the King of the Jews. But Pilate answered and said, What I have written, I have written; let it alone."

27:38 **two thieves.** The “thieves” are *léstēs* signifying that they were probably insurrectionists, like Barabbas and which, ironically, was exactly what the Jewish leaders accused Jesus of being.

27:38 **one on the right hand, the other on the left.** When several were crucified together, the Romans often put the more prominent or notorious criminal in the middle so as to give him the most attention.

27:39 **they that passed by.** Crucifixions were typically done at very public locations to increase the humiliation and the serve as a lesson for the people. Family and friends might stand by sad and weeping, while others could come up right next to the person and mock his suffering. The word “reviled” here is actually ‘blasphemed.’

27:39 **Wagging their heads.** This is ‘shaking their heads,’ a gesture of contempt and disapproval.

27:42 **come down from the cross.** Jewish tradition, stemming from Deuteronomy 21:22-23, was that a person who died by being hung on a tree (and crucifixion was considered that) was cursed of God. Thus the opposite was held to be true, that a person who didn’t die when hung on a tree was blessed of God. Their mocking comments are harking back to that tradition. Ironically, had Jesus heeded their words and come down from the cross, which he certainly had the power to do, he would have forfeited his right to be the King of Israel and the Messiah.

27:44 **the thieves.** The JST clarifies that it was just one of the thieves who mocked him with the crowd: “One of the thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth. But the other rebuked him, saying, Dost thou not fear God, seeing thou art under the same condemnation; and this man is just and hath not sinned; and he cried unto the Lord, that he would save him. And the Lord said unto him, This day thou shalt be with me in Paradise.” In the KJV, only Luke records Jesus’ words to the repentant thief. But in the JST, Matthew also captures them.

27:44 **cast the same in his teeth.** This is a wonderful William Tyndale phrase that he inserted in his 1534 translation (though the word order was slightly
different: “That same . . . [they] cast in his teeth”). The meaning of the single Greek word is simply ‘reproach’ or ‘insult.’

27:45 **darkness over all the land.** The three synoptic writers all record this event of darkness for roughly three hours, from about noon to 3:00 pm. It is not known what caused it, but the darkness to those people would have symbolized God’s displeasure and his judgment on evil and sin.

In the Americas, the Nephites recorded that at this same time they had “a great storm,” “a great and terrible tempest,” lightning and thunder, earthquakes, cities burning or sinking into the sea or being buried under mountains, and more such that “the whole face of the land was changed.” This destruction lasted for three hours, just like the darkness in Jerusalem. But then in the Americas, darkness set in, lasting for three days, with the people “howling and weeping” (3 Nephi 8). All of this was foretold by Samuel the Lamanite prophet many years previous (Helaman 13-15).

27:46 **Eli, Eli, lama sabacthani.** From Psalm 22:1, an Aramaic phrase meaning ‘My God, my God, why departed from me.’

James Talmage: “What mind of man can fathom the significance of that awful cry? It seems, that in addition to the fearful suffering incident to crucifixion, the agony of Gethsemane had recurred, intensified beyond human power to endure. In that bitterest hour the dying Christ was alone, alone in most terrible reality. That the supreme sacrifice of the Son might be consummated in all its fulness, the Father seems to have withdrawn the support of His immediate Presence, leaving to the Savior of men the glory of complete victory over the forces of sin and death” (Jesus the Christ, 612).

27:48 **vinegar.** This is oxos or sour wine, consumed by the poorest people. Sometimes the soldiers put a poison in it, not to speed death but as mockery for the crucified person. Jesus was offered it at the beginning of his experience, but refused, according to 27:34. This time, however, in his exhausted state after several hours of unbearable suffering, he drank.

27:50 **when he had cried again.** In the KJV, Matthew doesn’t record Jesus’ words, just that he cried out. But the JST adds, “saying, Father, it is finished, thy will is done.”

27:50 **yielded up the ghost.** Meaning, ‘let go of the spirit.’ He was in control of when he died all the time. It wasn’t until he had the confirming witness from the Father that his mission was fully complete that he passed from mortality into the world of the spirits.

Bruce McConkie: “How, then, does a God die? It is a voluntary act; no man taketh his life from him; he lays it down of himself; he has power to lay it down and power to take it again” (Mortal Messiah, 4:228).

27:51 **the veil of the temple was rent in twain.** This is the veil between the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies or Most Holy Place. The veil was 60 feet long and 30 feet wide. Its tearing represented the end of the old covenant and the beginning of the new, that Jesus’ sacrifice had made accessible the presence of God to all men.

Alfred Edersheim: “As we compute, it may just have been the time when, at the Evening-Sacrifice, the officiating Priesthood entered the Holy Place, either to burn the incense or to do other sacred service there. To see before them, not as the aged Zacharias at the beginning of this history the Angel Gabriel, but the Veil of the Holy Place rent from top to bottom—that beyond it they could scarcely have seen—and hanging in two parts from its fastenings above and at the side, was, indeed, a terrible portent, which would soon become generally known, and must, in some form or other, have been preserved in tradition. And they all must have understood, that it meant that God’s Own Hand had rent the Veil, and for ever deserted and thrown open that Most Holy Place where He had so long dwelt in the mysterious gloom, only lit up once a year by the glow of the censer of him, who made atonement for the sins of the people” (The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, 2:611-12).

Bruce McConkie: “Thus did Jesus, the Atoning One, through whose blood all men may freely pass through the veil into the presence of the Lord, thus did he, by the rending of the veil of the old temple, signify that its ordinances of atonement and forgiveness were done away in him. Thus did he, making his own body a new temple, as it were, signify that his atonement, and the forgiveness of sins made possible thereby, shall admit all true believers into his eternal Holy of Holies” (Mortal Messiah 4:230).

All of this leads us to an insightful scripture in Hebrews 10:19-20: “Having therefore, brethren, boldness to
enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh.”

27:51 the earth did quake, and the rocks rent. Matthew is the only one to mention an earthquake in conjunction with the death of the Savior.

27:52-53 the tombs also were opened. This happened after Jesus was resurrected, but Matthew told it here. Perhaps because he was excited about his story, perhaps because he wanted not to leave us hanging, so we would realize that Jesus’ tragic death was really a victory. However, commentators note that verses 51-53 provide a septrain (list of seven things) that happened as a result of his death: 1) veil of the temple rent; 2) earthquake; 3) rocks rent; 4) graves opened; 5) saints arose; 6) and went into the city; and, 7) and appeared to many. This perfect (the meaning of seven) list captures the impact, and then we continue on with the narration.

27:54 the centurion. The leader of a group of 80 or so soldiers, he was overseeing the crucifixion activities this day. Seeing all the things that were happening around Jesus, the man stated in fear, “Truly this was the Son of God.” All three synoptics record this occurrence, which prefigures the success that the apostles will have taking the gospel outside of Judea; no Jews standing by make this statement, but a Gentile recognizes who he really is. It also provides a parallel in Matthew tying the end back to the beginning, the Gentile centurion and the Gentile wise men (2:1). Matthew has several more of these repeated concepts, including: dreams (1:20; 27:19); conspiracies (2:8; 27:1); physical phenomena (2:2; 27:51); opposition from political leaders (2:3-4; 27:1-2); and angels (2:13; 28:2).

27:55 many women. Jesus had many female disciples, including Mary Magdalene; Mary the mother of James, one of the apostles; and Salome, the mother of James and John, and probably Jesus’ aunt (making James and John his cousins—see Mark 14:20 and John 19:25).


27:57 a rich man of Arimathea, named Joseph. Joseph is somewhat of a mystery person. He showed up here for the first time with a nice, new tomb in Jerusalem all ready to go (or the means to quickly acquire it), and was wealthy enough to help pay for the supplies needed for the burial. We don’t know where Arimathea was. We don’t know Joseph’s position that granted him an immediate audience with Pilate (though Mark calls him a “counselor” which could mean a member of the Sanhedrin). Much has been written about Joseph, almost all of it speculative, including much in the grail lore made famous by Dan Brown’s novel, The DaVinci Code. What we do know is that he was a disciple or Jesus and willing to help at this critical moment.

MATTHEW 27:62-66 – GUARD AT THE TOMB

27:62 Pharisees came together unto Pilate. Matthew alone records this incident of the Jewish leaders asking Pilate for a guard.

27:62 the next day that followed the day of the preparation. A long-winded way of saying the Sabbath day, since the day of preparation was Friday (to get ready for the Sabbath), so the next day was Saturday.

27:63 After three days I will rise again. Clearly the Jews understood Jesus’ words about the temple as applying to him, though during his trial they tried to make them literal and accuse him of speaking out against the temple.

27:66 You have a watch. Indicating the guard already assigned to them for Jesus’ arrest. Pilate authorizes them to also use these guards to watch the tomb.

27:67 sealing the stone. A rope was placed across the stone and the wall above it, with wax melted at both ends. Any tampering with the stone would be indicated by the broken wax.


28:1 the end of the Sabbath day, as it began to dawn. The Sabbath ended Saturday at sunset. This is dawn, Sunday morning.

28:2 the angel of the Lord. In the KJV, Matthew and Mark speak of one angel, Luke of two, and John doesn’t mention angels. In the JST, all four talk about two angels; Matthew says, “And, behold, there was a had been great earthquake: for the angel two angels of the Lord descended from heaven...”
28:2 **great earthquake.** Only Matthew records this earthquake (as with the one at Jesus’ death) and that the two angels “rolled back the stone.”

28:4 **as dead men.** The JST changes this to the more logical (since they speak in a few verses) “as **though they were dead men**” (which is the correct translation of the Greek).

28:6 **He is not here; for he is risen, as he said.** They came with great grief to prepare his body for final burial. Instead they found glorious angels proclaiming him alive again. Disaster turned to delight; a curse became a blessing; a tragedy turned to triumph. No greater words have ever been spoken to calm the fears and still the heart of humankind.

28:8 **with fear and great joy.** We can imagine their mixed emotions, seeing angels and hearing news that Jesus was alive again. Could it be true? It was so hard to imagine. But it must be! And off they ran to find the other disciples.

28:9 **Jesus met them.** Suddenly, there he was, in front of them. His first words were, “All hail!” or better translated, “Rejoice!” or “Be glad!”

28:9 **held him by the feet, and worshipped him.** Holding his feet and bowing before him was an acknowledgement of his deity; he was no longer just a teacher, but a resurrected God. The empty tomb shown them by the angels potentially raised many questions; Jesus’ appearance dispelled them all.

28:10 **tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me.** In Matthew, there were no appearances recorded in Judea except to these women. The disciples had to go to Galilee “into a mountain” where Jesus appeared to them. Galilee is the place of the forty day ministry where Jesus’ followers will be prepared for his true departure from among them.

Matthew’s post-resurrection account is short and focused—and unique. Once we learn from the angels that he was risen and saw him appearing to the women, he next appeared to the disciples in Galilee and gave them their commission to take his message to all the world.

28:16 **into a mountain.** Matthew reports no appearances by Jesus to anyone in Jerusalem except the women. It’s not until the disciples returned to Galilee and ascended a mountain “where Jesus had appointed them,” that they see the risen Lord. When this arrangement was made, we don’t know, though see Matthew 26:32; 28:7, 9-10 which set this up.

There are a number of mountains in Galilee that could qualify as the meeting place, including: Mount Arbel; Mount Hermon; Mount Tabor; or the Horns of Hittin. That it takes place on a mountain is a Matthew theme—the Mount of Temptation (4:8); the Sermon on the Mount (chapters 5-7, symbolizing the “new Moses” replacing the Ten Commandments which were received on a mountain); praying on the mountain (14:3); feeding the multitude on the mountain (15:29); the Mount of Transfiguration (17:1); the Mount of Olives (24:3 & 26:30). Mountains are places of communion with God, miracles, teaching, and the atonement itself.

Bruce McConkie and James Talmage both surmise that this was a prearranged meeting with many attendees, including the Seventies and other brethren, and faithful women disciples. In fact, it could well be the occasion of which Paul spoke when “he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once” (1 Corinthians 15:6; *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 1:866-867; Jesus...
the Christ, 694). In any case, the words of the teaching are only briefly summarized in Matthew’s account.

The timing of this event is also unknown, but one author surmises from the context that it was after the Day of Pentecost, since the disciples stayed in the Jerusalem area until that time (Studies in Scripture, 458).


28:18 All power is given unto me. Matthew’s account ends with Jesus giving parting words that he had been given “all power,” or ‘all authority.’ John will express it later: “Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power [authority]” (Revelation 4:11); “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing . . . And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power [authority], be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever” (Revelation 5:12-13). This also echoes Daniel 7:14, where was given him “dominion [power, authority], and glory, and a kingdom.”

28:19 teach all nations. The disciples should “teach all nations” (an expansion of the previous restriction to only go to the house of Israel) which is better translated ‘make disciples of all nations.’ How they become disciples is to be baptized and “observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.”

“The goal of instructing new disciples of Jesus is obedience to what he has commanded, so that their lives increasingly become like their Master” (Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary, 1:190).

Given the high priority of these, the last words of Jesus to the disciples in Matthew, it’s difficult to reconcile any belief system that doesn’t advocate baptism as an essential ordinance or the necessity of complete obedience toward salvation.

28:20 I am with you. Jesus ended with a promise: “I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.” Matthew started his work by telling us that Jesus shall be called “Emmanuel, (which being interpreted is, God with us)” (Matthew 1:23, quoting Isa 7:14). Now he ended with Jesus reminding us of that statement and confirming its truth.