



# “He Is Not Here: For He Is Risen”

Matthew 26-28

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## Introduction

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Matthew’s final three chapters cover Thursday through Sunday of Jesus’ final week on the earth, plus some post-resurrection material. Matthew’s passion narrative is powerful and dramatic. While very similar to Mark’s, it has some unique elements that are highlighted below but summarized here:

- Judas returning the thirty pieces of silver, hanging himself, and the purchase of the field with the money by the Jewish elders (27:3-10)
- Pilate’s wife’s dream and her request that Pilate have nothing to do with Jesus (27:19)
- Pilate washing his hands and the people taking Jesus’ blood upon them (27:24-25)
- Shaking of the earth, rocks rending, tombs opening, and people being raised at Jesus’ death (27:51b-53)
- Guards placed at the sepulcher as conspired by Pilate and Jewish leaders, the angel and earthquake that frightened them, and Jewish leaders paying them to tell a different story (27:62-66; 28:2-4, 11-15)

There are other small, unique things in Matthew’s account. The involvement of the scribes in the passion narrative is minimized; the naming of the high priest (as compared to Mark); the naming of Barabbas, and explaining certain details in reference to his present day.<sup>1</sup>

Matthew continues his pattern of citing scriptures that Jesus’ life events have fulfilled, with at least eleven in these chapters: 26:15, 31, 38, 64; 27:5-9, 10, 35, 39, 43, 46, 48.<sup>2</sup> There are several other scriptural allusions, some of which will be called out below in the running commentary.

## Outline of Matthew

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Matthew seems to break his work into seven sections (seven representing perfection): a prologue and climax, with five middle sections, each concluding with a major discourse by Jesus. This makes it similar to the five books of Moses. An overall outline for the book of Matthew is as follows (with the focus of this lesson in bold):

1. Prologue—Birth and Infancy (1-2)
2. Proclamation (3-4); Sermon on the Mount (5-7)
3. Galilean ministry (8-9); Missionary discourse (10)
4. Opposition (11-12); Parables (13)
5. Christ and the Church (14-17); Church life and order (18)
6. Jerusalem (19-23); Eschatological discourse (24-25)
7. **Climax—Passion, Death, and Resurrection (26-28)**

Note: In each lesson on the gospels, where there are overlapping or parallel texts, those will be noted in the heading. References in bold are the preferred reading(s) and will be the principal section of analysis, though some unique points in the current gospel will be noted, as well as helpful JST changes.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For a good summary, see Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 1:57-64.

<sup>2</sup> See Holzapfel, *A Lively Hope*, 84-85; there is a mistake in his sixth citation, which say “Matthew 69:3” and “My throat is dried,” which makes no sense since there are not 69 chapters and there is no such quote in Matthew. The reference to Exodus 9:12 should tie to Matt. 27:10 and relate to the Lord commanding them. See Beale and Carson, *Commentary*, 96.

<sup>3</sup> Not all JST changes are noted, only those of textual or doctrinal interest. Interested readers are encouraged to see Wayment, *The Complete Joseph Smith Translation of the New Testament* or the manuscripts themselves on the Joseph Smith Papers website (josephsmithpapers.org).

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

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### The Last Supper (Matt 26)

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In the previous chapters, Jesus taught the disciples many things on Tuesday before retiring back to Bethany for the night; the first two verses of chapter 26 are still on Tuesday or perhaps Wednesday (if the sun had set) either as they walked back to Bethany or after they arrived. Of his activities on Wednesday we have no record (unless the anointing in 26:6-13, which doesn't say when it happened, takes place that day). Perhaps he stayed in Bethany and privately taught the leading disciples? Thursday, however, was the day of the preparation for Passover, which began at sunset (Friday in their calendar), 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 a day, he will be lying in the tomb.

### The plot to kill Jesus – Matt 26:1-5 (Mark 14:1-2; Luke 22:1-2)

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

**26:2 *After two days.*** Meaning that the Passover feast starts in two days. It was Tuesday evening when he said this, or perhaps Wednesday (if the sun had set) and the feast started with the killing of the lamb on Thursday afternoon, followed by the Passover meal Thursday evening (Friday by their calendar) after sunset.

**26:3 *chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders.*** This collection of three groups united to oppose Jesus represents all the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem. They gathered at “the palace of the high priest,” which was located just west of the temple mount in the upper city. It's a fascinating but probably unanswerable question to ask, how did Matthew know about this meeting?

**26:3 *unto the palace of the high priest.*** Though the high priest's large home in Jerusalem is often referred to as a “palace” as a result of this verse, the Greek word is *aulē*, meaning an open courtyard associated with the home. In other words, they met within his walls but not within his home.

**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 (or “governor” as he's called in the KJV) over Palestine. In fact, Pilate and Caiaphas were both removed from office by Viltellius, 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.<sup>4</sup>

**26:4 *take Jesus by subtilty, and kill him.*** The word “subtilty” is better translated “deceit” or “stealth.” The JST (the first draft, not the final manuscript) 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 had so tenuously negotiated with the Romans over the years.

**26:5 *But they said.*** The Greek is singular, not plural, meaning “he said,” referring to the owner of the home, Caiaphas, who thus made this statement.

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<sup>4</sup> Holzapfel, *A Lively Hope*, 86.

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.

### Jesus anointed – Matt 26:6-13 (Mark 14:3-9; Luke 7:36-50; John 1:1-8)

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Both Luke and John relate a similar incident but place it much earlier in Jesus' ministry and offer differing details, causing some scholars to conclude that it might be a separate event. But it's unlikely that this happened to Jesus twice. In Mark's and Matthew's account, the owner of the home is named, and it happens either on Tuesday or Wednesday dinner (if it was after Sunset, either Wednesday or Thursday dinner).

26:6 **in the house of Simon.** Though Jesus was probably 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 perhaps 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 out of respect and to make the meal more pleasant by the odor. In this case, however, the woman (who is called Mary in John's gospel) pours on him a significant amount of nard oil (extracted from the root of the plant by that name; see John 12:3).

26:8 **when his disciples saw it.** John 12:4-6 names Judas Iscariot as the lone objector to her efforts and explains his alternate motivation, but Mark and Matthew keep the negative reaction generalized to "the disciples."

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.<sup>5</sup> 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. It was also the only known anointing he received as Messiah, which word means 'anointed one.' In other words, this unknown woman performed that act that allowed Jesus to claim the very title many had been calling him.

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..."

### Judas agrees to betray Jesus – Matt 26:14-16 (Mark 14:10-11; Luke 22:3-6)

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Though Mark and Luke include this incident, only in Matthew do we get Judas' query about how much they will give him to do the betrayal and the price they agree upon.

26:14 **Judas Iscariot.** As has been stated, there is no cliff-hanger in the gospel accounts of Jesus' death. We all know the outcome and we all know of the betrayal. This just confirms that Judas is now going to move ahead.

26:15 **thirty pieces of silver.** No coin is mentioned, so there are two possibilities: it is either *denarii*, which would equal about a week's wages, or *stater*, equal to four *denarii*, totaling about a month's wages. The amount was prophesied in Zechariah 11:12 (which Matthew will cite in 27:9-10) and was coincidentally the Mosaic amount owed to the owner of a slave gored by an ox (Exodus 21:32). Judas' question to the Jewish leaders in Matthew betrays his interest in money: "What will ye give me?"

### Preparation for the Passover – Matt 26:17-19 (Mark 14:12-16; Luke 22:7-13)

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See Luke.

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<sup>5</sup> Mark 14:5 says it was worth three hundred denarii, which Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds*, 1:161 estimates at over \$12,000.

## The start of the last supper – Matt 26:20 (Mark 14:17; Luke 22:14-18)

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See Luke.

## Betrayal foretold - Matt 26:21-25 (Mark 14:18-21; Luke 22:21-23; John 13:21-30)

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26:21 **one of you shall betray me.** The “you” refers to “the twelve” in v. 20, narrowing down the possibilities from others who might be also attending the dinner. It is a sobering and probably confusing way to start a Passover celebration.

26:22 **Lord, 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,” which Matthew clarifies in vv. 20-21 All of these statements provide subtle hints that the last supper included others besides the Twelve, contrary to all the paintings. 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?** “Master” is Rabbi, meaning ‘teacher.’ Judas had already agreed to betray Jesus, who with divine foresight, also knew he had done it. By asking this question, Judas showed brazen pride. When Jesus answered, “Thou has said,” he showed that he would proceed with the Father’s plan in full knowledge of Judas’ actions. The first manuscript of the JST modifies the end of the verse to make Jesus’ knowledge of Judas’ betrayal crystal clear: “Thou hast said **truly; for thou art the man.**”

## The sacrament – Matt 26:26-29 (Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:19-20)

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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 who accepts his sacrifice later. The first chronological mention (in terms of when something 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 clearer: “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 instituted 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 to 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.

### Peter's denial foretold – Matt 26:30-35 (Mark 14:27-31; Luke 22:31-38; John 13:36-38)

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

26:31 **All ye shall be offended because of me this night.** “Offended” is Greek *skandalizō*, meaning to put a stumbling block in the way and thus to disapprove or judge unfavorably, to stop believing. This has more meaning than simply them running away; Jesus is saying that the Twelve will turn away from him and cease to have faith in him because of the events of the coming night.

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

26:32 **after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee.** Their abandonment of Jesus was so complete that the angel at the tomb had to tell the women to remind the Twelve of this command (28:7). This commandment to meet Jesus in Galilee after the resurrection is unique to Mark and Matthew.

26:33 **yet will I never be offended.** Again, the Greek *skandalizō*, ‘scandalized,’ as in v. 31 and the term Jesus used about Peter (translated “offence” in Matthew 16:23) after the apostle tried to contradict Jesus’ statement that he was going to die. In both cases, Peter was fighting against a prophecy and resisting the divine Word.

26:34 **before the cock crow.** Countering Peter’s ardent declaration, Jesus quietly predicts a very different outcome for Peter. Some have tried to argue that this was a command from Jesus to Peter, but not in any of the gospels is this a command (imperative). Instead, it’s a prediction of a future event.

### Matthew 26:35 – 27:66 – Jesus’ Suffering and Death

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, and up the other side of the Mount of Olives to a small grove where olives were pressed and made into oil. It was a place where Jesus and his followers were inclined to go. But this night would be different, for in this grove 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 *paschō*, 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.

Scholars have long and great debates about the differences in the four gospels, and particularly about the Passion narratives. Over the years they have developed explanations that involve theoretical but plausible sources and interdependencies (such as the commonly accepted though hypothetical “Q” behind the Matthew and Luke accounting for the similarities between them that are not in Mark). Unfortunately, it often seems like a minority 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, the four gospels were written by late first or even second century authors based on oral

and written traditions developed in independent areas of Christian growth. They conclude that the differences are reflective of the beliefs of these separate groups as Christianity matured and determined what it would be. While many of these ideas are well-supported and match up with available evidence, the conclusions many reach as a result can diverge from a position of faith.

Scholars who analyze each detail of every trivial comment of Jesus and ignore the elements of his atoning sacrifice 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 most important reasons for these records. Latter-day Saints believe in the historicity and veracity of the NT message of salvation 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 recently fabricated religion but inspired representatives of God, writing according to the patterns of their day and their desire to share the salvific message of the Christ. 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 understanding into the meaning of the words and the events behind the stories. But I use their works with care 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.

### [Gethsemane – Matt 26:36-45 \(Mark 14:32-41; Luke 22:40-46; John 18:1\)](#)

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See also Luke.

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.

26:36 ***Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder***. Jesus wanted the companionship of the Twelve (or more accurately, the Eleven at this time) but also wanted some private time for what was about to happen.

26:37 ***he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee***. The three leaders of the Twelve, Peter, James, and John were asked by Jesus to come with him nearer to where he was praying.

26:38 ***exceeding sorrowful, even unto death***. Jesus (or Matthew) may have been paraphrasing Psalm 42:5 and 11. 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.'<sup>6</sup>

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***. Likely referring back to the cup from the last supper, which represented the shedding of his blood.

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<sup>6</sup> Skinner, *Gethsemane*, 49-65.

26:39 **nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.** Abinadi taught that Jesus would be “led, crucified, and slain, the flesh becoming subject even unto death, the will of the Son being swallowed up in the will of the Father” (Mosiah 15:7).

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 every impulse and instinct must have been to stop it, to send angels to intervene--but He did not intervene. 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.”<sup>7</sup>

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

26:40 **could ye not 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.

26:41 **that ye enter not into temptation.** Jesus is ever the teacher. Though he brought them there to pray with him (from a little distance), he used their falling asleep as a teaching moment to counsel continuing to ‘be alert’ and pray, with the lesson that “the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

26:42 **the second time.** After leaving the three disciples again, Jesus prayed a second time, though Matthew’s summary of his words reflects a little different approach. Instead of asking if there is any way to avoid what is coming, he now prayed that if this was the only way, “thy will be done.” In both prayers, he was willing to do the Father’s will, but in this case seems to have accepted that the agony of the Atonement was the only way to do that.

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

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<sup>7</sup> *Ensign*, May 1999.



either of these limited 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*.”<sup>8</sup>

James Talmage wrote: “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. 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 [loss of consciousness] 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.”<sup>9</sup>

Robert Millet said: “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.”<sup>10</sup>

26:45-46 *JST*

<b>Matt 26:45-46 KJV</b>	<b>JST</b>
Then cometh he to his disciples, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take <del>your</del> rest: behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.	Then cometh he to his disciples, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take <i>your</i> rest: <b>and they did so. And when they awoke, Jesus saith unto them,</b> behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. (NT1)
<b>Rise</b> , let us be going: behold, he is at hand that doth betray me.	<b>And after they had slept he said unto them, Arise, and</b> let us be going: behold, he is at hand that doth betray me. (NT2)

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 (change to v. 45 in the first manuscript and a similar change to v. 46 in the second). 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

<sup>8</sup> Skinner, *Gethsemane*, 5.

<sup>9</sup> Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 568-569.

<sup>10</sup> Robert L. Millet, “Treading the Winepress Alone,” in Jackson & Millet, *Studies in Scripture, The Gospels*, 436.

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 with torches and swords.

### The arrest – Matt 26:47-56 (Mark 14:43-52; Luke 22:47-53; John 18:2-12)

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See also Luke and John.

26:47 **Judas . . . and with him a great multitude.** John offers that this was a “band,” meaning a part of a legion, perhaps several hundred soldiers. It was a mixed army, with Roman troops (per John) and temple guards under the command of the high priest and the Sanhedrin (per the Synoptics).

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 (Sadducees) would have carried the staves—wooden clubs or staffs. Of course, the Jews could have had small swords as well (or big knives) which is the meaning of the word used.

26:48 **hold him fast.** Or, “arrest him” (NRSV, NIV, NJB).

26:49 **kissed him.** There are at least two possible ironies with Judas’ act. First, it was insulting and highly dishonorable for Judas to betray Jesus with a kiss, which was meant to proclaim 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).

26:51 **drew his sword.** The person who did this is not named in Matthew’s gospel but John’s gospel identifies him as Peter, who was one of two who had a small sword with him as they left the last supper (Luke 22:38).

26:52 **all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword.** It appears that even at this last hour, the disciples had yet to understanding that Jesus had not come as the vanquishing Messiah to overthrow the Romans. This proverbial phrase persists in many books, movies, and other forms today, used even by those who do not know its origin or context.

26:53 **twelve legions of angels.** A legion was up to 6,000, so twelve legions would be as many as 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; see Isaiah 37:36).

26:54 **how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled.** Though Jesus didn’t cite any specific scripture, Matthew’s point in including this is made throughout his book, with dozens of scriptures that he cites as being fulfilled in Christ.

26:55 **I sat daily with you teaching in the temple.** Even as he is being arrested, Jesus mocked them, questioning their nighttime confrontation when he was publicly teaching on a daily basis right under their noses.

26:56 **all the disciples forsook him, and fled.** Quickly running into the night and likely mingling in with the thousands of campsites scattered all over the Mount of Olives at this Passover season, every disciple is recorded to have left him in the hands of the arresting party. No doubt they feared arrest by association but likely they were also motivated by a desire to regroup and determine their next course of action.

### Jesus interrogated – Matt 26:57-68 (Mark 14:53-65; Luke 22:54-55, 63-65; John 18:13-16, 18-24)

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See John.

### Peter’s denial – Matt 26:69-75 (Mark 14:66-72; Luke 22:56-62; John 18:17, 25-27)

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See Mark and Luke.

## Trial before the council – Matt 27:1 (Mark 15:1a; Luke 22:66-71)

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See Luke.

### Judas' death – Matt 27:3-10

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27:3 **when he saw that he was condemned, repented.** Many have speculated about Judas' motivation in giving Jesus into the hands of the Jewish leaders. Was he trying to force Jesus' hand to reveal his power to the world and be the Messiah that Judas thought they needed? Had Jesus somehow disappointed or even offended him, so he wanted to move against Jesus? We do not know and what little can be teased out of the text points to something that required action on his part and generated deep regret when it didn't go as he apparently planned.

27:4 **JST**

Matt 27:4 KJV	JST
Saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What <i>is that</i> to us? see thou <i>to that</i> .	Saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said <b>unto him</b> , What <i>is that</i> to us? see thou <b>to it; thy sins be upon thee</b> .

This change increases the disdain the Jewish leaders have for Judas and dismisses his sudden guilt about the incident as his own problem. They used him to get what they wanted and now they have no further need of him.

27:5 **went 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.

Matt 27:5 KJV	JST
And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself.	And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself <b>on a tree. And straightway he fell down, and his bowels gushed out, and he died.</b>

27:6 **not lawful for to put them into the treasury.** We don't know the source of the thirty pieces of silver they gave to Judas; was it from temple funds or personal funds of those in the council or something else entirely? But since the money had been used by buy Judas' treachery and (on their part) hopefully Jesus' blood, they could not put them in the temple treasury funds, which seems hypocritical.

27:7 **bought with them the potter's field.** This field is unknown to us today, but was to them, as Matthew explains in v. 8, “unto this day.”

27:9 **fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy.** Not only indirectly Jeremiah 32:6-10 but more precisely Zechariah 11:12-13, both of which use the image of buying a field but in Zechariah we get both the mention of thirty pieces of silver and it being a potter's field.

## First appearance before Pilate – Matt 27:2, 11-14 (Mark 15:1b-5; Luke 23:1-7; John 18:28-38)

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See John.

## Pilate delivers Jesus to be crucified – Matt 27:15-30 (Mark 15:6-19; Luke 23:13-25; John 18:39-40, 19:1-16a)

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See also Luke.

27:15 **the governor wont 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 **a notable prisoner, called Barabbas.** This man was a ‘notorious’ or ‘well-known’ prisoner. Luke records that Barabbas was arrested for insurrection, the very thing Jesus was also being charged with. “Barabbas” potentially means ‘son of the father’ or perhaps ‘son of the teacher,’ showing that it was more a title than a name.<sup>11</sup> Some late manuscripts of the New Testament give his name also as Jesus (*Jesus* in Greek; Joshua in Hebrew), though scholars believe that this was in the original version of Matthew and suppressed because of it being the same as Jesus the Messiah’s name.<sup>12</sup> If that is correct, the people were being asked to choose between Jesus ‘son of the father/teacher’ and Jesus Son of the Father, the Great Teacher.

27:17 **Whom will ye that I release unto you?** Barabbas is not known outside of the New Testament text. But John calls him “a robber” (*lēstēs* in Greek, meaning ‘bandit’ or ‘insurrectionist’; 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. The two men crucified with Jesus had the same title (though translated “thieves” in 27:38). 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. Though they charged him with insurrection (basically, treason against Rome), Pilate could see no evidence for such a ruling, in Matthew’s account, leading to this deduction.

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 calls it) 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 of his wife’s message.

27:19 **that just man.** As we’ve seen in other incidents in Matthew, Jesus’ goodness is recognized by a Gentile woman but not by the Jewish leaders. This also echoes back to the start of the book where Joseph was called “a just man,” the only two times this phrase is used in Matthew’s gospel (with a third similar one in 27:24 below).

27:20 **they should ask Barabbas.** The Jewish somehow went among the crowd encouraging them to ask for Barabbas. This implies more than a spontaneous outburst of support; Pilate may have put the question of who to release to the Jewish leaders and then waited as they counseled to determine the answer.

27:22 **Let him be crucified.** Propelled by their leaders’ prompting, the gathered crowd spoke against Jesus, demanding his crucifixion, the worst punishment the Roman government could impose on someone. In Mark’s account, the JST has the crowd say, “**Deliver him unto us to be crucified. Away with him. Crucify him**” (JST Mark 15:13). 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 couldn’t, of course, because Rome reserved that punishment for itself, but the statement shows the hatred of those people for Jesus (note: *not* all the Jews, just those present that day, who were put there by the chief priests). The force of their statements seems to have taken Pilate by surprise, as he replied, “Why, what evil hath he done?” (v. 23).

27:24 **washed his hands.** Seeing that he could not convince the people but rather than he nearly had a riot building, something he absolutely had to avoid, 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, during which Pilate, like his wife, refers to Jesus as “just.”

27:24 **JST**

Matt 27:24 KJV

JST

<sup>11</sup> It could also mean simply ‘son of Abbas’ meaning that his father’s name was Abbas, an attested first century name. But most believe that his name is included specifically for the purpose of contrasting him to Jesus the Messiah.

<sup>12</sup> Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 1:796-800. Also, Metzger, *A Textual Commentary*, 56.

... and washed *his* hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye ~~to~~ ~~it~~.

... and washed *his* hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see **that** ye **do nothing unto him**.

Following his propensity to delete italicized words and replace them with alternate translations, Joseph Smith changed the sense of Pilate's last words from charging the Jews to kill Christ to forbidding them to do anything to him. The former doesn't make much sense since the Jews could not crucify Jesus, while a reading of the JST could be that he was declaring his intention to move ahead and telling them not to interfere with Roman punishment (because of their threat to do so in vv. 22, 25).

**27:25 *His blood be on us, and on our children.*** This passage has horribly been used to justify much persecution and even killing of Jews over the years, but the relatively small Jewish crowd gathered at Pilate's residence specifically to condemn Jesus was a formulaic expression of their willingness to take responsibility for his execution when Pilate would not. In any case, Pilate did send Jesus to be crucified, bending to the will of the people before him.

**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. This *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 six hundred soldiers were stationed at the Antonia Fortress. This was public humiliation in the "common hall" or *praitorion*, meaning the residence of the leading Roman authority. 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. His punishment would depend on where he 'landed' on the game board with each roll of the dice.

**27:28 *stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe.*** Men to be crucified were stripped naked (not with a loin cloth like in movies and pictures). As part of his taunting, they put a scarlet (or, "**purple**" in the JST) robe on Jesus, representing kingship.

**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.

[Led to Golgotha – Matt 27:31-32 \(Mark 15:20-21; Luke 23:26-32; John 19:16b-17a\)](#)

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This section will be discussed with Luke.

[Crucifixion – Matt 27: 33-56 \(Mark 15:22-41; Luke 23:33-49; John 19:17b-27\)](#)

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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 changed in Mark and John but he left Luke as "Calvary").

**27:34 *vinegar to drink mingled with gall.*** The KJV Greek manuscripts had *oxos*, which means 'vinegar.' But older and better manuscripts have *hoinon*, which is wine. "Gall" (Greek *cholē*) is something bitter, perhaps a poison of

some kind or something to lessen the pain while they hung him on the cross. Either way, Jesus didn't accept it and felt the full pain of the experience.

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 mocking 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 nails that were more like spikes. 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 seven feet high, not as high as is often 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 from small notations in the texts. 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 evidence is that the feet were nailed to the cross through the ankle or heel bone into the side of the upright post. One such victim's bones (a man named Jehohanan—John) was discovered in a tomb in Jerusalem in 1968, the iron spike still in the right heel (because the spike 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 feet and 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 *excruciatu*s, 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 many, 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 about this is discussed with John's account.

27:36 **sitting down they watched him there.** Once the victims were hanging on the cross, there wasn't much for the soldiers to do but wait for them to die and keep away anyone who might try to free them. Since such an attempt would be met with certain death, the soldiers could relax a bit as they waited for death to catch up with their charges.

27:37 **JST**

<b>Matt 27:37 KJV</b>	<b>JST</b>
And set up over his head his accusation written, THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS.	<b>And Pilate wrote a title, and put in 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</b>



**said, What I have written, I have written; let it alone.**

In the JST, Matthew (and Mark) are changed to harmonize with KJV John, in that they explain that Pilate wrote the sign for the cross and that the chief priests asked him to change it, but he refused.

27:38 **two thieves.** The “thieves” are *lēstēs* signifying that they were probably insurrectionists, like Barabbas.

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.

27:40 **If thou be the Son of God.** In Matthew’s gospel, unlike Mark’s, Jesus’ enemies know of his claims to be the Son of God, and use that in their mocking at his feet.

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 **JST**

<b>Matt 27:44 KJV</b>	<b>JST</b>
The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth.	<b>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.</b>

The JST clarifies that it was just one of the thieves who mocked him with the crowd. In the KJV, only Luke records Jesus’ words to the repentant thief. But in the JST, Matthew is harmonized with Luke to also capture them. This change adds one more witness of Jesus being a “just” man from another person outside of mainstream Judaism—a criminal suffering death for rebellion and treason.

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.** This is an Aramaic rendering of Psalm 22:1, meaning ‘My God, my God, why have you deserted me?’

James Talmage wrote, “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.”<sup>13</sup>

27:48 **vinegar**. This is *oxos*, meaning vinegar 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, likely because he smelled the “gall” (bitter ingredient; see 27:34). This time, however, in his exhausted state after several hours of unbearable suffering, he drank the vinegar-ish wine.

27:49 **let us see whether Elias will come**. The reference is to Elijah, which they mistakenly thought Jesus had called for when he said “Eli.”

27:50 **when he had cried again**. In the KJV, Matthew doesn’t record Jesus’ actual words, just that he cried out. But the JST adds, “**saying, Father, it is finished, thy will is done,**” aligning with John and harkening back to his complete willingness to do the will of the Father in Gethsemane.

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 asked, “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 probably the veil between the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies or Most Holy Place.<sup>14</sup> The veil was sixty feet long and thirty 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, and not just the high priest once a year on the Day of Atonement.

Alfred Edersheim taught, “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 adds, “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.” And, “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16).

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<sup>13</sup> *Jesus the Christ*, 613.

<sup>14</sup> There was also a veil between the court of the priests and the Holy Place where the lampstand, table of shewbread, and incense altar were replenished each day, but that one was passed through on a daily basis by one or more priests, so the more powerful symbolism had to do with the veil before the Holy of Holies.

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 graves 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 eighty to one hundred 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," which in turn echoes what he had heard the crowd accused Jesus of being. 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 were there.** 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). These women were "ministering unto him," meaning giving him of their means to support his mission and allow him to freely travel and preach without needing to stop and work to support himself.

### [The burial - Matt 27:57-61 \(Mark 15:42-47; Luke 23:50-56; John 19:38-42\)](#)

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See also John.

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 authors, including Dan Brown's novel, *The DaVinci Code*. What we do know is that he was a disciple of Jesus and willing to help at this critical moment.

### [The guard at the tomb – Matt 27:62-66](#)

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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.

27:64 **lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away.** The leaders feared that Jesus' disciples would sneak over to the tomb at night, steal his body, then report that he had risen from the dead as he prophesied.

27:65 **You have a watch.** Indicating the guard already assigned to them for Jesus' arrest. Pilate authorizes them to also use these guards to also watch the tomb.

27:66 **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 and missing rope.

## Matthew 28 – Resurrection and Appearances

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### The resurrection – Matt 28:1-10 (Mark 16:1-11; Luke 24:1-11; John 20:1-18)

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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 speak of 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**" (which is also an excellent translation of the Greek).

28:6 **He is not here; for he is risen, as he said.** The women came with great grief to prepare his body for final burial. Instead they found a glorious angel (or two, in the JST) proclaiming him to be 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 the grieving women, and all humankind since.

28:7 **go quickly, and tell his disciples.** The messenger from God gave the women two messages for Peter and the other disciples: Jesus was risen from the dead, and he would be meet them in Galilee, as he had promised in 26:32.

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. In this passage, Matthew adds to Mark's account ending with the women in fear (Mark 16:8). Not only does he tell what happens next, but adds that they felt joy mixed with their fear.

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 or a man, but a resurrected God. The empty tomb shown them by the angels potentially raised many questions; Jesus' appearance dispelled them.

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" (v. 16) where Jesus appeared to them. Galilee is the place of the forty-day ministry where Jesus' followers were prepared for his true departure from among them.

### The Guards' Report – Matt 28:11-15

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Following the story of the setting of the guard, Matthew finished by showing uniquely what happened to the guards after the appearing of the angels (verses 2-4) frightened them nearly to death. The soldiers reported to the chief priests all that they had seen (v. 11), and it was exactly as the Jewish leaders feared! In an attempt to keep things quiet, they concocted a story that the guards had all fallen asleep and that the disciples stole the body (v. 13), which is exactly the story they were trying avoid by having the guard in the first place.

There are many problems with this story. First, if Roman guards fell asleep on duty, they would be executed (hence their assurance that if Pilate finds out, they would let him know what was really going on in v. 14). Second, if they were all sleeping, how do they know who came and took the body? Third, the disciples were scattered and afraid, so no one would expect them to come against a contingent of armed soldiers in an attempt to steal a dead body. These things show how desperate the leaders were to have some success against Jesus in death that they couldn't have in life.

## The great commission – Matt 28:16-20

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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.<sup>15</sup>

28:17 **some doubted.** Even when many saw him, "some doubted," something John explains in greater detail.

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."<sup>16</sup>

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.

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<sup>15</sup> Jackson and Millet, *Studies in Scripture, The Gospels*, 458.

<sup>16</sup> Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds*, 1:190.

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- ESV – English Standard Version
- JST – Joseph Smith Translation
- KJV – King James Version
- LXX – Septuagint (Greek Old Testament)
- NASB – New American Standard Bible
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- NJB – New Jerusalem Bible
- NLT – New Living Translation
- NRSV – New Revised Standard Version

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