

Mark 15:21-47 ~ Scripture Verses

The Crucifixion

²¹ A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross.

²² They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means The Place of the Skull). ²³ Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it.

²⁴ And they crucified him. Dividing up his clothes, they cast lots to see what each would get.

²⁵ It was the third hour when they crucified him. ²⁶ The written notice of the charge against him read: THE KING OF THE JEWS. ²⁷ They crucified two robbers with him, one on his right and one on his left.[a] ²⁹ Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, “So! You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, ³⁰ come down from the cross and save yourself!”

³¹ In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves. “He saved others,” they said, “but he can’t save himself! ³² Let this Christ, [b] this King of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe.” Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

The Death of Jesus

³³ At the sixth hour darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour.

³⁴ And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?*”—which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” [c]

³⁵ When some of those standing near heard this, they said, “Listen, he’s calling Elijah.”

³⁶ One man ran, filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a stick, and offered it to Jesus to drink. “Now leave him alone. Let’s see if Elijah comes to take him down,” he said.

³⁷ With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last.

³⁸ The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. ³⁹ And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, heard his cry and saw how he died, he said, “Surely this man was the Son of God!”

⁴⁰ Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. ⁴¹ In Galilee these women had followed him and cared for his needs. Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there.

The Burial of Jesus

⁴² It was Preparation Day (that is, the day before the Sabbath). So as evening approached, ⁴³ Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Council, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus’ body. ⁴⁴ Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead. Summoning the

centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died.⁴⁵ When he learned from the centurion that it was so, he gave the body to Joseph.⁴⁶ So Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock. Then he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb.⁴⁷ Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph saw where he was laid.

Footnotes:

- a. Mark 15:27 – Some manuscripts add: ²⁸ and the scripture was fulfilled which says, “He was counted with the lawless ones” (Isaiah 53:12)
- b. Mark 15:32 – Or Messiah
- c. Mark 15:34 – Psalm 22:1

New International Version, NIV, 1984

Mark 15:21-47 ~ Discussion Questions

1. Why did the soldiers seize Simon of Cyrene? Who was he? What do their actions reveal about Jesus' condition?
2. Why did such a large crowd gather?
3. Simon's encounter with Jesus was rather very unusual. How did you first encounter Jesus? Have you experienced a "random" event in your life that upon later reflection showed God's sovereign will being worked out in you?
4. Where was Jesus crucified? Why was it called Golgotha?
5. What do you know about Jesus' physical crucifixion itself?
6. While Jesus was in unbelievable agony on the cross, he spoke several phrases called the last words of Christ. How many times did he speak? What did he say? (Matthew 27:46, 50; Mark 15:34, 37; Luke 23:34, 43, 46; John 19:26-27, 28, 30)
7. Mark 15:25 reads, "It was the third hour when they crucified him." What's the whole timeline? (Mark 15:25, Luke 23:44, John 19:14)
8. Which of these things did NOT happen when Jesus died? (Matthew 27:51-53)
A. the veil of the temple was torn in two B. an earthquake
C. many saints were raised from the dead D. the moon turned blood red
E. the sun stopped shining
9. What is the significance of the veil or curtain of the temple being torn in half? (This is incredibly important. If you remember only one thing from these verses, this should be it!)
10. Why do you think Mark mentioned the women who were watching in 15:40-41 and 15:47?
11. What kind of man was Joseph of Arimathea? Why was it courageous what he did? What risks did he take?
12. How did Joseph's position and status conflict with his actions? In what ways does being a Christian go against what people expect of you?
13. What do Jesus' actions teach us about submitting to God's will?

Mark 15:21-47 ~ Leader's Guide

1. Why did the soldiers seize Simon of Cyrene? Who was he? What do their actions reveal about Jesus' condition?

Simon was probably a Jew who was in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. Mark mentions his sons, Alexander and Rufus in a way that suggests that his readers might know them. We, of course, do not have much knowledge of what happened after Jesus' crucifixion. However, Simon, after carrying Jesus' cross, may well have gotten involved, along with his sons, with other Christ followers. Thus when Mark wrote his account some years later, Alexander and Rufus might well be friends, possibly even leaders in the new Christian movement.

The soldiers seized Simon to carry Jesus' cross because after all his beatings, Jesus was probably weak and faltering under the weight of the cross. Without any historical or biblical proof, Medieval and Renaissance painters have given us our picture of Christ carrying the entire cross. But the upright post, or stipes, was generally fixed permanently in the ground at the site of execution and the condemned man was forced to carry the patibulum (horizontal bar or cross piece), weighing about 110 pounds, from the prison to the place of execution. It would have been placed across the nape of the victim's neck and balanced on both shoulders. Dr. Andreas Lambrianides, General Surgeon, in Brisbane, Australia, explains that crucifixion practices often varied. If the patibulum was attached two to three feet below the top of the stipes, then the cross was called the "low tau" (after the Greek letter T) as compared to the "high tau" where the patibulum was attached to the top of the stipes.

An additional block called the suppendaneum was used for the support and fixing the feet in later times. The titulus or small sign, stating the victim's crime, was carried at the front of the procession from the prison. It was then usually nailed to the cross above the victim's head. The final part of the cross was the sedulum, a horizontal wooden block serving as a crude seat, and it was attached midway down the stipes. The weight of the entire cross was probably over 300 pounds while that of the patibulum (horizontal bar) ranged between 75 and 125 pounds.

2. Why did such a large crowd gather?

It's a spectacle, a party of sorts. Jesus had many followers who believed he was the Messiah and could not possibly be killed. Then too, the Jewish leaders had worked up the crowd and also had many followers. As late as the 1800s in England, executions were among the most popular and best attended public events.

3. Simon's encounter with Jesus was rather very unusual. How did you first encounter Jesus? Have you ever experienced a "random" event in your life that

upon later reflection showed God's sovereign will being worked out in you?

4. Where was Jesus crucified? Why was it called Golgotha?

Golgotha means "the place of the skull." It may have been called that because of a rock formation or small hill that looked like a skull. Or it might have been so named because so many executions were carried out there. Or both.

5. What do you know about Jesus' physical crucifixion itself?

This description is courtesy of Dr. C. Truman Davis. In the very early morning, battered and bruised, dehydrated, and exhausted from a sleepless night, Jesus appears before several Roman rulers after which he is beaten and scourged. A Roman legionnaire steps forward with the flagrum (or flagellum) in his hand. This is a short whip consisting of several heavy, leather thongs with two small balls of lead attached near the ends of each. The heavy whip is brought down with full force again and again across Jesus' shoulders, back, and legs. At first the thongs cut through the skin only. Then, as the blows continue, they cut deeper into the subcutaneous tissues, producing first an oozing of blood from the capillaries and veins of the skin, and finally spurting arterial bleeding from vessels in the underlying muscles.

The small balls of lead first produce large, deep bruises which are broken open by subsequent blows. Finally the skin of the back is hanging in long ribbons and the entire area is an unrecognizable mass of torn, bleeding tissue. When it is determined by the centurion in charge that the prisoner is near death, the beating is finally stopped.

The half-fainting Jesus is then untied and allowed to slump to the stone pavement, wet with His own blood. The Roman soldiers see a great joke in this provincial Jew claiming to be king. They throw a robe across His shoulders and place a stick in His hand for a scepter. They still need a crown to make their travesty complete. Flexible branches covered with long thorns (commonly used in bundles for firewood) are plaited into the shape of a crown and this is pressed into His scalp. Again there is copious bleeding, the scalp being one of the most vascular areas of the body.

After mocking Him and striking Him across the face, the soldiers take the stick from His hand and strike Him across the head, driving the thorns deeper into His scalp. Finally, they tire of their sadistic sport and the robe is torn from His back. Already having adhered to the clots of blood and serum in the wounds, its removal causes excruciating pain just as in the careless removal of a surgical bandage, and almost as though He were again being whipped the wounds once more begin to bleed.

In deference to Jewish custom, the Romans return His garments. The heavy patibulum of the cross is tied across His shoulders, and the procession of the condemned Christ, two thieves, and the execution detail of Roman soldiers headed

by a centurion begins its slow journey along the Via Dolorosa. In spite of His efforts to walk erect, the weight of the heavy wooden beam, together with the shock produced by copious blood loss, is too much. Jesus stumbles and falls. The rough wood of the beam gouges into the lacerated skin and muscles of the shoulders. He tries to rise, but human muscles have been pushed beyond their endurance.

The centurion, anxious to get on with the crucifixion, selects a stalwart North African onlooker, Simon of Cyrene, to carry the cross. Jesus follows, still bleeding and sweating the cold, clammy sweat of shock, until the almost half mile journey from the fortress Antonia to Golgotha is finally completed.

Jesus is offered wine mixed with myrrh, a mild analgesic mixture. He refuses to drink. Simon is ordered to place the patibulum on the ground and Jesus quickly thrown backward with His shoulders against the wood. The legionnaire feels for the depression at the front of the wrist. He drives a heavy, square, wrought-iron nail through the wrist and deep into the wood. Quickly, he moves to the other side and repeats the action being careful not to pull the arms too tightly, but to allow some flexion and movement. The patibulum is then lifted in place at the top of the stipes and the titulus reading “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews” is nailed in place.

The left foot is now pressed backward against the right foot, and with both feet extended, toes down, a nail is driven through the arch of each, leaving the knees moderately flexed. The Victim is now crucified. As He slowly sags down with more weight on the nails in the wrists excruciating pain shoots along the fingers and up the arms to explode in the brain—the nails in the wrists are putting pressure on the median nerves. As He pushes Himself upward to avoid this stretching torment, He places His full weight on the nail through His feet. Again there is the searing agony of the nail tearing through the nerves between the metatarsal bones of the feet.

At this point, as the arms fatigue, great waves of cramps sweep over the muscles, knotting them in deep, relentless, throbbing pain. With these cramps comes the inability to push Himself upward. Hanging by his arms, the pectoral muscles are paralyzed and the intercostal muscles are unable to act. Air can be drawn into the lungs, but cannot be exhaled. Jesus fights to raise Himself in order to get even one short breath. Finally, carbon dioxide builds up in the lungs and in the blood stream and the cramps partially subside. Spasmodically, he is able to push Himself upward to exhale and bring in the life-giving oxygen.

6. While Jesus was in unbelievable agony on the cross, he spoke several phrases called the last words of Christ. How many times did he speak? What did he say? (Matthew 27:46, 50; Mark 15:34, 37; Luke 23:34, 43, 46; John 19:26-27, 28, 30)

Traditionally, Christ is said to have spoken seven last words (or phrases). The Narrated Bible edited by F. LaGard Smith puts them in chronological order that varies slightly from some others, but is probably as good as any.

1. “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.” (Luke 23:34-35)
2. (To the one criminal who repented) “I promise that today you will be with me in paradise.” (Luke 23:43)
- 3a. (To his mother, looking at John) “This man is now your son.” (John 19:26)
- 3b. (To John, standing with his mother) “She is now your mother.” (John 19:27)
4. “*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?*” which means, “My God, my God, why have you deserted me?” (Matt 27:46, Mark 15:34)
5. “I am thirsty.” (John 19:28)

(Just before he died)

Once again Jesus shouted and then He died. (Matt 27:50, Mark 15:37) [This is generally not considered one of the last words as it is simply a “shout.”]

6. Luke reports the words, “Father, I put myself in Your hands.” (Luke 23:46)
7. John reports the words, “Everything is done” (or “It is finished.”) (John 19:30)

Perhaps the most discussed utterance is #4, “My God, my God, why have you deserted me?” Here is what pastor and author Mark Roberts has to say about it:

As Jesus was dying on the cross, he echoed the beginning of Psalm 22, which reads:

My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?
 Why are you so far away when I groan for help?
 Every day I call to you, my God, but you do not answer.
 Every night you hear my voice, but I find no relief. (vv. 1-2)

In the words of the psalmist Jesus found a way to express the cry of his heart: Why had God abandoned him? Why did his Father turn his back on Jesus in his moment of greatest agony?

This side of heaven, we will never fully know what Jesus was experiencing in this moment. Was he asking this question because, in the mystery of his incarnational suffering, he didn’t know why God had abandoned him? Or was his cry not so much a question as an expression of profound agony? Or was it both?

What we do know is that Jesus entered into the Hell of separation from God. The Father abandoned him because Jesus took upon himself the penalty for our sins. In that excruciating moment, he experienced something far more horrible than physical pain. The beloved Son of God knew what it was like to be rejected by the Father. As we read in 2 Corinthians 5:21, “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

I can write these words. I can say, truly, that the Father abandoned the Son for

our sake, for the salvation of the world. But can I really grasp the mystery and the majesty of this truth? Hardly. As Martin Luther once said, “God forsaking God. Who can understand it?” Yet even my minuscule grasp of this reality calls me to confession, to humility, to worship, to adoration.

7. Mark 15:25 reads, “It was the third hour when they crucified him.” What’s the whole timeline? (Mark 15:25, Luke 23:44, John 19:14)

John says Pilate spoke to the Jewish leaders at the sixth hour (in Roman time, 6:00 a.m.) and shortly thereafter handed Jesus over to be crucified. Mark records that Jesus was put on the cross at the third hour (in Hebrew time, 9:00 a.m.). Luke records darkness coming over the whole land at the sixth hour (12 noon) until the ninth hour (3:00 p.m.) Shortly after which Jesus breathed his last.

8. Which of these things did NOT happen when Jesus died? (Matthew 27:51-53)
A. the veil of the temple was torn in two B. an earthquake
C. many saints were raised from the dead D. the moon turned blood red
E. the sun stopped shining

D. (The moon turned blood red) Matthew 27:51-53. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split. The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus’ resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people.

Extra Credit: When did or will the moon turn red and where is this recorded? On the second coming of the LORD as recorded in Joel 2:30-31. I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.

Acts 2:20 – The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the LORD.

Revelation 6:12-13 – I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red

9. What is the significance of the veil or curtain of the temple being torn in half? (This is incredibly important. If you remember only one thing from these verses, this should be it!)

This significant event symbolized Christ’s work on the cross. The temple had three parts: the courts for all the people, the Holy Place where only the priests could enter, and the Most Holy Place, where only the high priest could enter once a year to atone for the sins of the people. It was the Most Holy Place where the ark of the covenant, and God’s presence with it, rested. The curtain that was torn was

the one that closed off the Most Holy Place from view. At Christ's death, the barrier between God and man was split in two. Now all people can approach God through Christ.

10. Why do you think Mark mentioned the women who were watching in 15:40-41 and 15:47?

The disciples were there, but again, at a distance. They may have been afraid to be seen—fearing for their lives. Or they may have been embarrassed that the man they considered their Lord and Messiah was now just another criminal being put to death.

The people of God have been blessed and often sustained by the courageous faithfulness of godly women. While the men who were closest to Jesus betrayed, denied, and abandoned him, the women were different. They followed him as he passed through the streets going to Golgotha, were present at the Cross and burial, met him at the empty tomb, and were present in the upper room at Pentecost. Don't underestimate or devalue the importance of godly women. Jesus never did!

11. What kind of man was Joseph of Arimathea? Why was it courageous what he did? What risks did he take?

First of all, Joseph of Arimathea (a village 20 miles northwest of Jerusalem) fulfilled Isaiah's prediction that the grave of the "Suffering Servant" would be with a rich man (Isaiah 53:9 – "He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth." Jesus was to have been buried with other executed criminals. It was not to be a burial with honor. However, Joseph, a wealthy man, gave Jesus an honorable burial by placing him in his own tomb.

This was an act of love, but also courage as Pilate may have felt that Joseph would make him look bad by honoring a criminal he had sentenced to death. The release of the body of someone condemned and executed for high treason, and especially to one who was not an immediate relative, was quite unusual.

12. How did Joseph's position and status conflict with his actions? In what way does being a Christian go against what people expect of you?

Joseph was a member of the Sanhedrin, the body that condemned Jesus to death. Either Joseph was not present at the meeting of the Sanhedrin late the night before or he did not support the vote to have Jesus killed. Mark 14:64 suggests that he was not present because it says the decision was supported by "all."

13. What do Jesus' actions teach us about submitting to God's will?