The Cross, the Empty Tomb, and the Ascension

Bible Stories Anthology — Luke 23–24; John 19–20; Acts 1:1-11

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> **Romans 15:4** *For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.*

Why These Stories Were Written — Romans 15:4

Paul had just quoted a thousand-year-old psalm and applied it to Christ (Romans 15:3, quoting Psalm 69:9), and then he explained why he could: *whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning*. **Written aforetime** — the scriptures that already stood before this present age of grace opened at Pentecost: the record God gave through Moses, the prophets and the writings, along with the Gospel accounts of Christ's earthly ministry, which belong to that same time before Pentecost. (When Paul wrote these words, the scriptures he had in hand were the Hebrew scriptures; the Gospels had not yet been written down.) **Written for our learning** — "learning" is the Greek word for *teaching*, the very word rendered "doctrine" in 2 Timothy 3:16. These are not quaint tales; they are doctrine in narrative form. Adam, Ruth and David never knew us, but God did, and He had their lives recorded with us in mind — written *for* us, though not all of it written *to* us, which is why we read Israel's history as our instruction and not as our marching orders. **Through patience and comfort of the scriptures** — "patience" is literally *remaining under*, the staying power we gain from watching men and women stay under a load; "comfort" is a *calling alongside*, the strength God brings when He meets them there, which is why Paul calls Him "the God of patience and consolation" in the very next verse. **That we might have hope** — not a wish, but confident expectation: the return of Jesus Christ and everlasting life with Him. That is why these accounts exist, and it is how they should be read.

Three Days That Changed Everything

Every story in this collection has been pointing here. The coats of skin in Eden. The ark that carried eight souls through judgment. The ram caught in the thicket in place of Isaac. The Passover lamb whose blood marked the door. Joseph, betrayed and raised to the right hand of the throne. Jonah, three days and three nights in the deep. The seed of the woman, born in Bethlehem.

Now the promise is kept. The Son of God is handed over by His own nation, sentenced by a Roman governor who knows He is innocent, whipped, mocked and nailed to a cross between two criminals. He dies. He is buried in a borrowed tomb, and a stone is rolled over the entrance, and it is sealed, and soldiers stand guard.

Then the tomb is empty.

He is seen alive, not by one frightened follower in the dark, but by women at dawn, by His disciples behind locked doors, by a doubting Thomas who put his finger in the nail prints, and by more than five hundred people at once. For forty days He eats with them and teaches them. Then, on the Mount of Olives, He is taken up into heaven before their eyes, to sit at the right hand of God.

The cross, the empty tomb and the ascension belong together. Without the cross, there is no payment for sin. Without the resurrection, the cross is only a death. Without the ascension, the risen Christ has no throne, and there is no gift of holy spirit poured out from heaven. This is the one story all the others were written to lead us to.

The Setting

When. At Passover, in Jerusalem, about A.D. 30. Jesus was crucified on "the preparation of the passover" (John 19:14), the fourteenth day of the first month, the day the Passover lambs were slain (Leviticus 23:5). He died "about the ninth hour" (Matthew 27:46) — about three in the afternoon, the hour, as the story of the Passover in this series showed, when the lambs began to be killed at the temple. He was buried before sunset, because the next day was "an high day" (John 19:31), the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, a holy sabbath (Leviticus 23:6-7).

Jesus had said He would be "three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matthew 12:40). Scripture also speaks of "the third day" and "after three days" (Luke 24:7; Matthew 27:63). As this series understands it, He lay in the tomb the full three days and three nights, and was raised on the seventeenth day of the month — the same day of the month on which Noah's ark came to rest after the Flood. The tomb was already empty when the women arrived "upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning" (Luke 24:1). Scripture does not tell us the hour He rose; it tells us He was not there.

Where. Jerusalem: the governor's judgment hall; a place of execution just outside the city wall called Golgotha, "the place of a skull"; a garden nearby with a new tomb cut into the rock; a locked room in the city; the road to Emmaus; and the Mount of Olives near Bethany, east of the city.

Who. Jesus; Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judaea; the chief priests and rulers; Barabbas; Simon of Cyrene; two criminals crucified with Him; Roman soldiers and their centurion; Mary His mother, Mary Magdalene and the other women; the disciple whom Jesus loved (John); Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus; Peter; Thomas; two angels; and the LORD God, who raised Him from the dead.

The situation. Jesus had been arrested the night before in the garden of Gethsemane, betrayed by Judas, one of His own twelve. He had been tried through the night before the high priest and the Jewish council, who condemned Him for blasphemy. But only Rome could carry out an execution, so at daybreak they brought Him to Pilate.

This is the end of the **administration of Christ**, the period of Jesus' earthly ministry that began at His baptism. What happens in these days — the cross, the resurrection and the ascension — makes possible the next administration, the **grace administration**, which opened fifty days after the Passover, on the day of Pentecost, when the gift of holy spirit was poured out.

The Story, Told Faithfully

No Fault in Him

> **Luke 23:1** *And the whole multitude of them arose, and led him unto Pilate.*
>
> **Luke 23:2** *And they began to accuse him, saying, We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, saying that he himself is Christ a King.*

Before the Jewish council the charge had been blasphemy. Before Pilate they changed it to a political one: that Jesus opposed paying taxes to Rome and claimed to be a king. The first part was false — Jesus had said, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which be Caesar's" (Luke 20:25). The second was true, but not in the way they meant.

> **Luke 23:3** *And Pilate asked him, saying, Art thou the King of the Jews? And he answered him and said, Thou sayest it.*
>
> **Luke 23:4** *Then said Pilate to the chief priests and to the people, I find no fault in this man.*

Pilate examined Jesus and found nothing. He said so three times (Luke 23:4, 14, 22). He sent Jesus to Herod Antipas, the ruler of Galilee who happened to be in Jerusalem, and Herod found nothing either (23:15). The Passover lamb had to be "without blemish" (Exodus 12:5), examined and kept under watch. The Lamb of God was examined by every authority in the land, and none of them could find a fault.

Pilate offered a way out. It was his custom to release one prisoner at the feast.

> **Luke 23:18** *And they cried out all at once, saying, Away with this man, and release unto us Barabbas:*
>
> **Luke 23:19** (Who for a certain sedition made in the city, and for murder, was cast into prison.)

Barabbas means *son of the father*. He was guilty of rebellion and murder — the very crime Jesus was falsely accused of. The guilty man went free. The innocent man took his place. There is no clearer picture in scripture of what the cross would do.

Behold the Man

> **John 19:1** *Then Pilate therefore took Jesus, and scourged him.*
>
> **John 19:2** *And the soldiers platted a crown of thorns, and put it on his head, and they put on him a purple robe,*
>
> **John 19:3** *And said, Hail, King of the Jews! and they smote him with their hands.*

Scourging was a Roman flogging with a whip of several leather thongs, often weighted with pieces of bone or metal, that tore the skin and flesh of the back. Men sometimes died from it. Isaiah had written, "his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men" (Isaiah 52:14).

The soldiers made a game of it: a crown twisted from thorny branches, a purple cloak (the colour of royalty), mock salutes, and blows. Thorns first appeared in scripture as part of the curse on the ground after Adam's sin (Genesis 3:18). Here they were pressed onto the head of the one who came to remove the curse.

> **John 19:5** *Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns, and the purple robe. And Pilate saith unto them, Behold the man!*

"Behold the man!" Pilate may have hoped the sight of Jesus, beaten and bleeding, would satisfy them. It did not. But Pilate said more than he knew. Here was *the man* — the second Adam, the one perfect man, standing where the first man's sin had brought all of us.

> **John 19:7** *The Jews answered him, We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God.*

Note the charge: not that He claimed to be God, but that He claimed to be "the Son of God." That was the claim. It was true.

> **John 19:10** *Then saith Pilate unto him, Speakest thou not unto me? knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee?*

> **John 19:11** *Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin.*

Pilate thought he was in charge. Jesus told him he was not. Nothing was happening outside God's knowledge. But that did not excuse anyone. Jesus still spoke of "sin" — Pilate's, and the "greater sin" of those who handed Him over.

> **John 19:14** *And it was the preparation of the passover, and about the sixth hour: and he saith unto the Jews, Behold your King!*
>
> **John 19:15** *But they cried out, Away with him, away with him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar.*

"We have no king but Caesar." The chief priests of Israel — the nation whose true King was God — publicly declared their loyalty to a pagan emperor in order to be rid of God's anointed King.

> **Luke 23:24** *And Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they required.*
>
> **Luke 23:25** *And he released unto them him that for sedition and murder was cast into prison, whom they had desired; but he delivered Jesus to their will.*

The Way to the Skull

> **Luke 23:26** *And as they led him away, they laid hold upon one Simon, a Cyrenian, coming out of the country, and on him they laid the cross, that he might bear it after Jesus.*

A condemned man carried his own cross, or at least the heavy crossbeam, to the place of execution. John says Jesus went out "bearing his cross" (John 19:17). Somewhere on the way, weakened by the scourging, He could not go on, and the soldiers forced a passer-by to carry it. Simon came from Cyrene in North Africa (today's Libya), where there was a large Jewish community; he may have been a pilgrim in town for the feast. Mark names his sons, Alexander and Rufus (Mark 15:21), as though Mark's readers knew them — as this series understands it, the man who carried the cross may have become a believer, and his family with him.

> **Luke 23:27** *And there followed him a great company of people, and of women, which also bewailed and lamented him.*
>
> **Luke 23:28** *But Jesus turning unto them said, Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children.*
>
> **Luke 23:31** *For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?*

Even on the way to His own death, Jesus was thinking of others. He warned of the destruction that would fall on Jerusalem, which came forty years later, when the Romans besieged and burned the city in A.D. 70. "If they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?" This is a proverb and a **metaphor** — a figure of speech that speaks of one thing as another. Green wood does not burn easily; dry wood does. If Rome would do this to an innocent man, what would it do to a guilty, rebellious city?

They Crucified Him

> **Luke 23:32** *And there were also two other, malefactors, led with him to be put to death.*
>
> **Luke 23:33** *And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left.*

“Calvary” comes from the Latin word for *skull*, *calvaria*; the Aramaic name is *Golgotha* (John 19:17). It was outside the city wall but near it, beside a road where passers-by could see (John 19:20).

“There they crucified him.” The Gospels say it in three words. Everyone who first read them knew what crucifixion was. **Crucifixion** was Rome’s most shameful and cruel form of execution, reserved for slaves, rebels and the worst criminals. The Roman orator Cicero called it the cruellest and most horrible of punishments. The condemned man was stripped, and his wrists and feet were nailed or tied to the wooden cross. (In 1968, in a tomb in Jerusalem, archaeologists found the heel bone of a crucified man from this very period with an iron nail still driven through it.) Hanging by the arms made breathing agony; to take a breath a man had to push up on his nailed feet. Death came slowly, from exhaustion, shock, loss of blood and suffocation — sometimes over hours, sometimes over days. It was designed to be public, slow and humiliating.

Under the Law, one who was hanged on a tree was “accursed of God” (Deuteronomy 21:23). Paul would later write, “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree” (Galatians 3:13).

“Between two malefactors.” Isaiah had written seven centuries earlier that the Servant of the LORD “was numbered with the transgressors” (Isaiah 53:12).

> **Luke 23:34** *Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots.*

“Father, forgive them.” Of all the things a man could say while nails were driven through him, Jesus prayed for the men doing it. (A few of the oldest manuscripts of Luke do not include this sentence, but many others do, and it fits everything Jesus taught: “pray for them which despitefully use you” [Luke 6:28].) Isaiah had said He “made intercession for the transgressors” (Isaiah 53:12).

The King of the Jews

> **John 19:19** *And Pilate wrote a title, and put it on the cross. And the writing was, JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS.*
>
> **John 19:20** *This title then read many of the Jews: for the place where Jesus was crucified was nigh to the city: and it was written in Hebrew, and Greek, and Latin.*
>
> **John 19:21** *Then said the chief priests of the Jews to Pilate, Write not, The King of the Jews; but that he said, I am King of the Jews.*
>
> **John 19:22** *Pilate answered, What I have written I have written.*

A condemned man’s crime was posted on a board. Pilate wrote Jesus’ “crime”: He was the King of the Jews. He wrote it in the three languages of that world — Hebrew (or Aramaic), the language of the Jews; Greek, the language of trade and learning; and Latin, the language of Roman power. The whole world could read it. Pilate meant it as an insult to the chief priests. He had written the truth.

> **John 19:23** *Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments, and made four parts, to every soldier a part; and also his coat: now the coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout.*
>
> **John 19:24** *They said therefore among themselves, Let us not rend it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be: that the scripture might be fulfilled, which saith, They parted my raiment among them, and for my vesture they did cast lots. These things therefore the soldiers did.*

The clothes of the executed belonged to the executioners. Four soldiers divided His garments; they gambled for the seamless undergarment. A thousand years earlier, David had written in Psalm 22, “They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture” (Psalm 22:18). The same psalm says, “they pierced my hands and my feet” (22:16) — written centuries before crucifixion was invented.

> **Luke 23:35** *And the people stood beholding. And the rulers also with them derided him, saying, He saved others; let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God.*

“He saved others; let him save himself.” They meant it as mockery, but it was the truth, turned inside out. This is **irony** — words that carry a deeper meaning than the speaker intends. Because He saved others, He would not save Himself. He had said, “No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself” (John 10:18).

Two Malefactors

> **Luke 23:39** *And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us.*
>
> **Luke 23:40** *But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation?*
>
> **Luke 23:41** *And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss.*
>
> **Luke 23:42** *And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.*

Two men dying beside Jesus. One mocked. The other feared God, admitted his guilt, declared Jesus innocent, and asked to be remembered “when thou comest into thy kingdom.” A dying man looking at a dying man — and seeing a King with a kingdom still to come.

> **Luke 23:43** *And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.*

The earliest Greek manuscripts had no punctuation; every comma in our Bibles was added by later editors. The words can equally be read, “Verily I say unto thee to day, thou shalt be with me in paradise” — a solemn promise made *today*, on this day of all days, from this cross. As this series understands it, that is the reading that fits the rest of scripture. The man had asked to be remembered when Jesus comes into His kingdom; Jesus answered the question he asked. “Paradise” in scripture is tied to the restored creation, where “the tree of life… is in the midst of the paradise of God” (Revelation 2:7). The dead sleep until the resurrection; when Christ returns and comes into His kingdom, that man will be there with Him.

Behold Thy Mother

> **John 19:25** *Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene.*
>
> **John 19:26** *When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son!*
>
> **John 19:27** *Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home.*

Most of the disciples had fled. A few women and one disciple stood near. The sword Simeon had spoken of thirty-three years before was piercing Mary’s soul (Luke 2:35).

“Woman” was a respectful form of address in that culture, not a cold one. Jesus, the eldest son, gave His mother into the care of the disciple He loved, John. Even in agony He provided for His family. (His own brothers did not yet believe in Him [John 7:5]; they would, after the resurrection.)

Darkness

> **Luke 23:44** *And it was about the sixth hour, and there was a darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour.*
>
> **Luke 23:45** *And the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst.*

From about noon until about three in the afternoon, darkness covered the land. It was not an eclipse; Passover always fell at the full moon, when a solar eclipse is impossible. God darkened the sky over the death of His Son.

> **Matthew 27:46** *And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*

These are the opening words of Psalm 22 — the same psalm that described the pierced hands and feet and the gambling for His clothes. In Jesus’ day, quoting the first line of a psalm was a way of calling to mind the whole psalm. Psalm 22 begins in anguish, but it ends in triumph: “For he hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath he hid his face from him; but when he cried unto him, he heard” (Psalm 22:24).

Was He abandoned? No. The night before, He had told His disciples, “ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me” (John 16:32). And Paul writes that at the cross “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself” (2 Corinthians 5:19). The word translated “forsaken,” *egkataleipō*, means to leave behind, to leave someone in a situation. Peter used the same word: “thou wilt not leave my soul in hell” (Acts 2:27). God did not step in to take Him down from the cross, as the mockers dared Him to do (Matthew 27:42-43), because our redemption required that He die. God left Him there to finish the work. He never abandoned Him.

The cry was real. Jesus bore the full weight of sin — “he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin” (2 Corinthians 5:21) — and He felt it as the deepest desolation any man has ever known. But notice what He called the One He cried to: “*My* God.” He did not stop trusting. And the psalm He quoted tells us the answer to His cry: God heard Him. Three days later, God proved it.

It Is Finished

> **John 19:28** *After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst.*
>
> **John 19:29** *Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar: and they filled a spunge with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it to his mouth.*
>
> **John 19:30** *When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.*

“I thirst.” “In my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink” (Psalm 69:21). The vinegar was cheap sour wine, the soldiers’ drink. It was lifted to Him on a stalk of **hyssop** — the same plant Israel had used to paint the Passover lamb’s blood on their doorposts (Exodus 12:22).

“It is finished.” In Greek it is one word, *tetelestai*: *it has been completed*, *brought to its end*, *accomplished*. The same word is found on some ancient receipts, marking a bill as settled. The work the Father had given Him to do — the whole purpose of His life — was done. The debt was paid.

> **Luke 23:46** *And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost.*

“Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.” Again Jesus prayed a psalm: “Into thine hand I commit my spirit: thou hast redeemed me, O LORD God of truth” (Psalm 31:5). He entrusted His life to His Father, confident that God would give it back. “Gave up the ghost” means *breathed His last*. Jesus truly died.

Luke records that at that moment “the veil of the temple was rent in the midst.” Matthew adds, “from the top to the bottom” (Matthew 27:51). The **veil** was the great curtain in the temple that separated the holy place from the most holy place, where God’s presence dwelt. Only the high priest could pass through it, once a year, with blood. Later Jewish tradition describes it as enormous and as thick as a man’s hand. It was torn from the top — as this series understands it, torn by God, not by man — to show that the way into God’s presence was now open. “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” (Hebrews 10:19-20).

Truly This Was the Son of God

> **Luke 23:47** *Now when the centurion saw what was done, he glorified God, saying, Certainly this was a righteous man.*
> **Luke 23:48** *And all the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts, and returned.*

A **centurion** was a Roman officer commanding about a hundred soldiers. He had supervised countless executions. He had never seen a man die like this. Luke records him saying, “Certainly this was a righteous man”; Matthew records, “Truly this was the Son of God” (Matthew 27:54). The first Gentile to confess Jesus after His death was the soldier in charge of killing Him.

The crowd “smote their breasts” — beat their chests, the Eastern gesture of grief and remorse — and went home.

Not a Bone Broken

> **John 19:31** *The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day, (for that sabbath day was an high day,) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away.*
> **John 19:32** *Then came the soldiers, and brake the legs of the first, and of the other which was crucified with him.*
> **John 19:33** *But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs:*
> **John 19:34** *But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water.*

The Law said a hanged man’s body must not remain on the tree overnight (Deuteronomy 21:23), and the next day was a holy sabbath. Breaking the legs meant a crucified man could no longer push himself

up to breathe, and he died quickly. The two criminals were still alive. Jesus was already dead — so soon that even Pilate was surprised (Mark 15:44).

To make sure, a soldier drove a spear into His side, and "blood and water" came out. Many physicians who have studied the account believe this shows fluid had gathered around the heart and lungs from the trauma. Whatever the medical explanation, John, who was standing there, insisted it happened: "he that saw it bare record, and his record is true" (19:35). Jesus was dead.

> **John 19:36** *For these things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken.*
>
> **John 19:37** *And again another scripture saith, They shall look on him whom they pierced.*

Of the Passover lamb, God had said, "neither shall ye break a bone thereof" (Exodus 12:46). And Zechariah had prophesied that Israel "shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son" (Zechariah 12:10).

A Rich Man's Tomb

> **Luke 23:50** *And, behold, there was a man named Joseph, a counsellor; and he was a good man, and a just:*
>
> **Luke 23:51** (The same had not consented to the counsel and deed of them;) he was of Arimathaea, a city of the Jews: who also himself waited for the kingdom of God.
>
> **Luke 23:52** *This man went unto Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus.*

Joseph was a member of the council that had condemned Jesus — but he had not agreed with them. He had been a disciple "secretly for fear of the Jews" (John 19:38). Now, when the other disciples were hiding, the secret disciple came into the open. He went to Pilate and asked for the body. It was a brave thing to do.

> **John 19:39** *And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight.*
>
> **John 19:40** *Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury.*
>
> **John 19:41** *Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid.*
>
> **John 19:42** *There laid they Jesus therefore because of the Jews' preparation day; for the sepulchre was nigh at hand.*

Nicodemus, too, had once come to Jesus secretly, "by night" (John 3:2). Now he came in the daylight with about a hundred Roman pounds of spices — some seventy-five of our pounds — an amount fit for a king's burial (compare King Asa, laid on a bed "filled with sweet odours and divers kinds of spices," 2 Chronicles 16:14). The magi had brought myrrh to a young child. Nicodemus brought myrrh for His burial.

Jews did not embalm their dead as the Egyptians did. They washed the body, wrapped it in strips of linen with spices layered in the folds, bound a separate cloth around the head, and laid it on a stone shelf in a tomb cut into the rock. The entrance was closed with a large stone, often a disc-shaped stone rolled in a groove.

The tomb was new, "wherein never man before was laid" (Luke 23:53), and Matthew says it was Joseph's own (Matthew 27:60). Isaiah had written that "he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death" (Isaiah 53:9) — crucified among criminals, buried in a rich man's tomb.

> **Luke 23:55** *And the women also, which came with him from Galilee, followed after, and beheld the sepulchre, and how his body was laid.*
> **Luke 23:56** *And they returned, and prepared spices and ointments; and rested the sabbath day according to the commandment.*

The women watched where He was laid. They knew the tomb. They would not go to the wrong one.

The Sealed Stone

Matthew records what the chief priests did next.

> **Matthew 27:62** *Now the next day, that followed the day of the preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate,*
> **Matthew 27:63** *Saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again.*
> **Matthew 27:64** *Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first.*
> **Matthew 27:65** *Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch: go your way, make it as sure as ye can.*
> **Matthew 27:66** *So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch.*

His enemies remembered His promise to rise better than His disciples did. They sealed the stone — a cord stretched across it and fixed with wax or clay stamped with an official seal, so that any tampering would show — and set a guard of soldiers. They did everything they could to keep Him in that tomb. Every precaution they took became evidence that the body did not leave by human hands.

The First Day of the Week

> **Luke 24:1** *Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain others with them.*
> **Luke 24:2** *And they found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre.*
> **Luke 24:3** *And they entered in, and found not the body of the Lord Jesus.*

The women came to finish the burial. They were not expecting a resurrection; they were bringing spices for a corpse. They found the stone rolled away and the body gone. Matthew tells us the stone was moved by an angel, and the guards "became as dead men" (Matthew 28:2-4). The stone was not rolled away to let Jesus out. It was rolled away to let the witnesses in.

> **Luke 24:4** *And it came to pass, as they were much perplexed thereabout, behold, two men stood by them in shining garments:*
> **Luke 24:5** *And as they were afraid, and bowed down their faces to the earth, they said unto them, Why seek ye the living among the dead?*

> **Luke 24:6** *He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee,*
>
> **Luke 24:7** *Saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.*

"Why seek ye the living among the dead?" A question that is really a rebuke and an announcement at once — the figure of speech called **erotesis**, a question asked to make a point. The tomb was the wrong place to look for Him.

"He is not here, but is risen." Jesus had told them plainly, more than once, that He would be killed and raised (Luke 9:22; 18:31-33). They had not understood.

> **Luke 24:9** *And returned from the sepulchre, and told all these things unto the eleven, and to all the rest.*
>
> **Luke 24:10** *It was Mary Magdalene, and Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, and other women that were with them, which told these things unto the apostles.*
>
> **Luke 24:11** *And their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not.*

Here is a detail no one inventing the story would have included. The first witnesses of the empty tomb were women. In that culture, a woman's testimony was not accepted in court; the Jewish historian Josephus records the rule that it was not to be admitted. If someone had made up the resurrection, he would never have made women its first witnesses. And the apostles' reaction — "idle tales," *nonsense* — shows they were not expecting it either.

The Grave Clothes

> **John 20:3** *Peter therefore went forth, and that other disciple, and came to the sepulchre.*
>
> **John 20:4** *So they ran both together: and the other disciple did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulchre.*
>
> **John 20:5** *And he stooping down, and looking in, saw the linen clothes lying; yet went he not in.*
>
> **John 20:6** *Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulchre, and seeth the linen clothes lie,*
>
> **John 20:7** *And the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself.*
>
> **John 20:8** *Then went in also that other disciple, which came first to the sepulchre, and he saw, and believed.*
>
> **John 20:9** *For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead.*

John tells this like an eyewitness — the younger man outrunning Peter, stopping at the entrance, Peter barging straight in. John, as usual, does not name himself; he is "the other disciple."

What they saw convinced John. The linen wrappings were lying there, and the cloth that had been around the head was "wrapped together in a place by itself." Grave robbers do not unwrap a body, bound with linen and seventy-five pounds of sticky spices, and leave the expensive linen neatly behind. The body was gone and the grave clothes were not. "He saw, and believed."

Mary

> **John 20:11** *But Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping: and as she wept, she stooped down, and looked into the sepulchre,*
>
> **John 20:12** *And seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain.*
>
> **John 20:13** *And they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? She saith unto them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him.*
>
> **John 20:14** *And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus.*
>
> **John 20:15** *Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away.*
>
> **John 20:16** *Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master.*

Mary Magdalene, from whom Jesus had cast out seven devils (Luke 8:2), stayed when the men went home. She was the first person to see the risen Christ. She did not recognise Him — through tears, in the early light, not expecting Him — until He said her name. "Mary." Jesus had said, "the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name" (John 10:3).

> **John 20:17** *Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.*
>
> **John 20:18** *Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that he had spoken these things unto her.*

"Touch me not" is better understood as *stop clinging to me, don't hold on to me*. She had grabbed hold of Him as if she would never let go. He had somewhere to go and something for her to do.

"My brethren." For the first time, Jesus calls His disciples His brothers.

"I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God." Mark these words well. The risen Christ, on the morning of His resurrection, calls the Father "my God." He is the Son; the Father is His God, as He is ours. The resurrection did not make Jesus into God. It showed that God had raised His Son.

Peace Be Unto You

That same afternoon, two disciples walking to the village of Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, met a stranger on the road who explained to them, "beginning at Moses and all the prophets… in all the scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:27). They recognised Him only when He broke bread at their table — and then He vanished. That story deserves its own telling, and it has one in this series. They ran all the way back to Jerusalem that night.

> **Luke 24:36** *And as they thus spake, Jesus himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you.*
>
> **Luke 24:37** *But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit.*

> **Luke 24:38** *And he said unto them, Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts?*
>
> **Luke 24:39** *Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have.*
>
> **Luke 24:40** *And when he had thus spoken, he shewed them his hands and his feet.*
>
> **Luke 24:41** *And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, he said unto them, Have ye here any meat?*
>
> **Luke 24:42** *And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish, and of an honeycomb.*
>
> **Luke 24:43** *And he took it, and did eat before them.*

The doors were locked "for fear of the Jews" (John 20:19). Suddenly He was standing among them. They thought He was a ghost — a **spirit**, a disembodied appearance.

He was not. "Handle me, and see." He showed them the nail wounds in His hands and feet. "A spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have." And then, to settle it, He asked for something to eat and ate a piece of fish in front of them. The resurrection was not a vision, a feeling, or a spiritual survival of the soul. The body that was nailed to the cross and laid in the tomb was raised to life, changed and glorified, but real — a body that could be touched and could eat.

"They yet believed not for joy." That is, it seemed too good to be true.

My Lord and My God

> **John 20:24** *But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came.*
>
> **John 20:25** *The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.*

Didymus means *twin*. Thomas has been remembered as "doubting Thomas," but he asked for no more than the others had already been given: to see the wounds.

> **John 20:26** *And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you.*
>
> **John 20:27** *Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing.*
>
> **John 20:28** *And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God.*
>
> **John 20:29** *Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.*

Jesus offered Thomas exactly what he had demanded, word for word. Jesus had heard what he said when He was not in the room.

"My Lord and my God." Many read Thomas's words as a statement that Jesus is God Himself. This series reads them differently, and it is worth explaining why. In the Hebrew scriptures, the word for "God," *elohim*, is sometimes given to men who stand in God's place and carry His authority: to Moses (Exodus 7:1), to Israel's judges (Psalm 82:6), and to the anointed king, in the psalm that says, "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever… therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee" (Psalm 45:6-7). Jesus Himself pointed to this usage: "Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods?… Say ye of him, whom the Father hath

sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God?" (John 10:34, 36). As this series understands it, Thomas, overwhelmed, was acknowledging the risen Jesus as his Lord and as the one in whom God Himself was present and acting — God's anointed King, bearing God's authority. Only eight days before, Jesus had called the Father "my God, and your God." And John, in the very next verses, tells us exactly what he wanted his readers to believe:

> **John 20:30** *And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book:*
> **John 20:31** *But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.*

"That Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God." That is the confession John wrote his whole Gospel to produce.

"Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." That is us.

Forty Days

> **Acts 1:3** *To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God:*

For forty days Jesus appeared to His followers, "by many infallible proofs" — *convincing evidences*. "Passion" means *suffering*. Paul, writing some twenty-five years later, lists some of the witnesses:

> **1 Corinthians 15:5** *And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve:*
> **1 Corinthians 15:6** *After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep.*
> **1 Corinthians 15:7** *After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles.*

More than five hundred at once, most of them still alive when Paul wrote — he was inviting his readers to go and ask them. "James" is the Lord's own brother, who had not believed in Him during His ministry, and who became a leader of the church in Jerusalem.

"Fallen asleep" is how the New Testament speaks of believers who have died. It is a **euphemism** — a gentle expression in place of a harsh one — and also a promise: those who sleep will wake.

During those days, Jesus opened the scriptures to them:

> **Luke 24:44** *And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me.*
> **Luke 24:45** *Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures,*
> **Luke 24:46** *And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day:*
> **Luke 24:47** *And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.*
> **Luke 24:48** *And ye are witnesses of these things.*
> **Luke 24:49** *And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.*

“The law of Moses, and… the prophets, and… the psalms” — the three divisions of the Hebrew Bible. All of it, He said, was about Him. That is why every story in this series has ended by asking where it leads to the Messiah.

“The promise of my Father.” Jesus told them to wait in Jerusalem until they were “endued with power from on high.” That promise was the gift of holy spirit.

Taken Up

> **Acts 1:8** *But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.*
>
> **Acts 1:9** *And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.*
>
> **Acts 1:10** *And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel;*
>
> **Acts 1:11** *Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.*

Luke tells it in his Gospel this way:

> **Luke 24:50** *And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them.*
>
> **Luke 24:51** *And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven.*
>
> **Luke 24:52** *And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy:*
>
> **Luke 24:53** *And were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. Amen.*

On the Mount of Olives, near Bethany, with His hands lifted in blessing, Jesus was taken up. The last thing His disciples saw was His hands raised over them, blessing them. A cloud — as this series understands it, the same cloud of God’s glorious presence that filled the tabernacle and overshadowed the mount of transfiguration — received Him.

“Why stand ye gazing up into heaven?” Another question that makes a point. There was work to do. And a promise with it: “this same Jesus… shall so come in like manner.” The same Jesus, in a real body, will come back. The prophet Zechariah said that in that day “his feet shall stand… upon the mount of Olives” (Zechariah 14:4).

“They… returned to Jerusalem with great joy.” Not grief. When He died, they scattered in fear. When He left them the second time, they went home rejoicing, because they knew where He had gone.

Where had He gone? Peter would tell the crowd on the day of Pentecost: “This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear” (Acts 2:32-33). David had written, “The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool” (Psalm 110:1). The one who was crucified sat down at the right hand of God — the place of highest honour and authority.

What Came Next

About ten days later, on the day of Pentecost, the disciples were gathered together in Jerusalem, as He had told them.

> **Acts 2:2** *And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.*
> **Acts 2:3** *And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.*
> **Acts 2:4** *And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.*

The promise of the Father had come. The ascended Christ had "shed forth" the gift of holy spirit. A new administration had begun — the administration of grace, in which we live today. That day, too, deserves its own story in this series.

Where the Story Leads

To the Messiah

Every story in this collection has pointed here, and so has every book of the Old Testament.

- **The seed of the woman** (Genesis 3:15). The serpent bruised His heel at the cross; He crushed the serpent's head by rising from the dead, destroying "him that had the power of death, that is, the devil" (Hebrews 2:14).
- **The coats of skin** (Genesis 3:21). God covered the guilty with the covering of a death.
- **The ark** (Genesis 7). Those inside passed safely through judgment and came out into a new world — on the seventeenth day of the month.
- **The ram in the thicket** (Genesis 22). "God will provide himself a lamb." He did not become the Lamb; He provided Him.
- **Joseph** (Genesis 37–50). Betrayed by his brothers, counted as dead, raised to the right hand of the throne, and the saviour of those who betrayed him.
- **The Passover lamb** (Exodus 12). Without blemish, slain on the fourteenth, at the ninth hour, not a bone broken. "Christ our passover is sacrificed for us" (1 Corinthians 5:7).
- **David** (1 Samuel 17). The champion who fought and won for his people.
- **Jonah**. Three days and three nights in the deep, then brought up alive — "a greater than Jonas is here."
- **Isaiah 53**. "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities… and with his stripes we are healed."
- **Psalm 22**. The pierced hands and feet, the lots cast for His clothing, and a God who "hath not hid his face from him."
- **Psalm 16:10**. "Thou wilt not… suffer thine Holy One to see corruption."
- **Psalm 110:1**. "Sit thou at my right hand."

To the Grace Administration

The gospel in four lines. Paul summed up the message he preached:

> **1 Corinthians 15:3** *For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;*
> **1 Corinthians 15:4** *And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:*

Died, buried, raised — and, as the rest of the New Testament adds, exalted. "Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification" (Romans 4:25).

If Christ be not raised. Paul is blunt: "if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins" (1 Corinthians 15:17). Christianity stands or falls on the empty tomb. "But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept" (15:20) — the first of the harvest, the guarantee of all who will follow.

Paid in full. "It is finished." God, through the cross, blotted out "the handwriting of ordinances that was against us… nailing it to his cross; And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it" (Colossians 2:14-15).

The veil is open. Believers now have "boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus" (Hebrews 10:19). No priest, no curtain, no annual ceremony stands between us and God.

Raised and seated with Him. The same power that raised Jesus and seated Him at God's right hand is at work in every believer (Ephesians 1:19-20). God "hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:6). "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God" (Colossians 3:1).

The gift poured out. Because He ascended, He received from the Father the promise of holy spirit and poured it out (Acts 2:33). Without the ascension, there is no Pentecost, and no grace administration.

How to be saved. "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved" (Romans 10:9). Notice what must be believed: that God raised Him from the dead.

Our hope. "This same Jesus… shall so come in like manner." "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him… For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout… and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:14, 16-17). That is the hope Romans 15:4 promised these stories would give.

To the Topic of Who Killed Jesus

People have often asked who was responsible for the death of Jesus. Scripture gives a full answer.

- **Men did it.** Peter told the crowd, "ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain" (Acts 2:23). The chief priests handed Him over; Pilate sentenced Him; the soldiers drove the nails.

- **The adversary was behind it.** “Then entered Satan into Judas” (Luke 22:3). “None of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory” (1 Corinthians 2:8). This was the bruising of the heel promised in Genesis 3:15.
- **Jesus gave Himself.** “No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself” (John 10:18).
- **God gave His Son, and God raised Him.** God knew and planned that His Son would be handed over — “by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God” — because “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son” (John 3:16). But the killing was the work of wicked hands. What God Himself did is stated just as plainly: “Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it” (Acts 2:24). God is the Deliverer. He brought life out of the worst thing men and the adversary could do.
- **And we did.** “He was wounded for *our* transgressions.” “Christ died for *our* sins.” The cross was for us.

The Main Takeaway

Jesus Christ died for our sins, was buried, was raised by God from the dead, and was taken up to God’s right hand — and because He lives, everyone who believes on Him is forgiven, given new life, and has a sure hope of His return.

- **The cross paid for sin in full.** “It is finished.”
- **The tomb is empty.** Women, disciples, a doubter and five hundred witnesses saw Him alive.
- **The risen body was real.** He could be touched, and He ate.
- **He ascended and sits at God’s right hand**, and from there He poured out the gift of holy spirit.
- **Jesus is the Son of God**, and His Father is His God and ours (John 20:17, 31).
- **God is the Deliverer.** Men and the adversary killed Jesus; God raised Him.
- **He is coming back** — “this same Jesus… in like manner.”

For Our Learning — The People

- **Jesus.** The Son of God, the Lamb without blemish, condemned though innocent, crucified, dead and buried, raised by God on the third day, seen alive for forty days, and taken up to God’s right hand.
- **Pontius Pilate.** The Roman governor who found no fault in Jesus three times and sentenced Him anyway.
- **The chief priests and rulers.** They handed Jesus over, chose Barabbas, declared “We have no king but Caesar,” mocked Him at the cross, and sealed the tomb.
- **Barabbas.** A rebel and murderer, set free in Jesus’ place.
- **Simon of Cyrene.** A passer-by from North Africa forced to carry the cross; the father of Alexander and Rufus.
- **The two malefactors.** One mocked; one feared God, confessed his guilt and asked to be remembered in Christ’s kingdom.
- **The Roman soldiers.** They scourged Him, crowned Him with thorns, gambled for His clothes, nailed Him to the cross and pierced His side.

- **The centurion.** The officer in charge, who said, “Truly this was the Son of God.”
- **Mary, the mother of Jesus.** She stood by the cross and was given into John’s care.
- **The disciple whom Jesus loved (John).** He stood by the cross, took Mary home, outran Peter to the tomb, “saw, and believed,” and wrote his Gospel so that we might believe.
- **Joseph of Arimathaea.** A secret disciple on the council who asked for the body and laid it in his own new tomb.
- **Nicodemus.** He brought seventy-five pounds of myrrh and aloes to bury Jesus as a king.
- **Mary Magdalene.** Healed by Jesus, she stayed at the tomb, was the first to see the risen Lord, and carried His message to the disciples.
- **Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women.** The first witnesses of the empty tomb.
- **Peter.** He ran to the tomb, saw the grave clothes, and was seen by the risen Lord.
- **Thomas (Didymus).** He would not believe without seeing the wounds, and when he saw, confessed, “My Lord and my God.”
- **James, the Lord’s brother.** An unbeliever until the risen Jesus appeared to him.
- **The angels.** They announced, “He is not here, but is risen,” and at the ascension, “this same Jesus… shall so come.”
- **The LORD God.** He gave His Son, heard His cry, raised Him from the dead, and seated Him at His own right hand.

For Our Learning — Customs and Orientalisms

- **Roman law in Judaea.** Only the Roman governor could carry out an execution.
- **The Passover release.** The governor’s custom of freeing one prisoner at the feast.
- **Scourging.** A Roman flogging with a weighted whip, which could kill.
- **The purple robe and crown.** Mockery of royalty.
- **Carrying the cross.** The condemned carried the crossbeam to the place of execution.
- **Crucifixion.** Rome’s most shameful execution, for slaves and rebels; death by exhaustion and suffocation, often slow.
- **The title.** The charge posted over the condemned; Jesus’ in Hebrew, Greek and Latin.
- **The executioners’ share.** The condemned man’s clothes went to the soldiers.
- **Sour wine on hyssop.** The soldiers’ cheap drink, lifted on the stalk of the Passover plant.
- **The veil of the temple.** The great curtain before the most holy place.
- **Smiting the breast.** The Eastern gesture of grief and remorse.
- **Breaking the legs.** To hasten the death of the crucified before a holy day.
- **“The preparation” and “an high day.”** The day before a sabbath; here the fourteenth, before the feast sabbath of the fifteenth.
- **Jewish burial.** Washing, wrapping in linen with spices, a separate head cloth, a rock-cut tomb, and a rolling stone — no embalming.
- **The seal.** A cord and official stamp across the stone to show any tampering.
- **Women as witnesses.** Their testimony was not accepted in court in that culture.
- **“Woman.”** A respectful form of address.
- **“Rabboni.”** An Aramaic title of honour, *my Master*, *my Teacher*.

- **Lifted hands.** The posture of a priest pronouncing a blessing.
- **The right hand.** The place of highest honour and authority beside a king.

For Our Learning — Figures of Speech

A figure of speech is a deliberate departure from the plain, ordinary way of saying something, used by God to add emphasis and feeling. These are the ones in this story:

- **Metaphor** — speaking of one thing as another. "If they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?" (Luke 23:31).
- **Irony** — words carrying a deeper meaning than the speaker intends. "He saved others; let him save himself" (Luke 23:35); "Behold your King!" (John 19:14); Pilate's title, "THE KING OF THE JEWS."
- **Erotesis** — a question asked to make a point. "Why seek ye the living among the dead?" (Luke 24:5); "Why stand ye gazing up into heaven?" (Acts 1:11).
- **Euphemism** — a gentle expression in place of a harsh one. "Fallen asleep" and "them that slept," for those who have died (1 Corinthians 15:6, 20).
- **Anthropopatheia** — describing God in human terms. "The right hand of God" (Acts 2:33) — God has no physical right hand; the phrase pictures the highest place of honour and power.
- **Metonymy** — one word put for another closely connected with it. "The cross," for all that Christ's death accomplished (Colossians 2:14); "blood," for His life given in death (Hebrews 10:19).
- **Quotation of a psalm's first line** to call up the whole psalm. "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Psalm 22:1).

What the Bible Actually Says

- **Pilate declared Jesus innocent three times** (Luke 23:4, 14, 22).
- **The charge was that He "made himself the Son of God"** (John 19:7) — not that He claimed to be God.
- **Scripture does not name the weekday of the crucifixion.** It names the day of the month: the preparation of the Passover, the fourteenth, before "an high day."
- **The darkness was not an eclipse.** Passover fell at full moon.
- **"My God, my God" is the first line of Psalm 22**, which ends, "when he cried unto him, he heard."
- **The veil was torn "from the top to the bottom."**
- **Jesus really died** — the soldiers confirmed it, the spear confirmed it, Pilate confirmed it with the centurion.
- **The tomb was a new, rock-cut tomb belonging to a rich man**, sealed and guarded.
- **The stone was rolled away to let the witnesses in**, not to let Jesus out.
- **Women were the first witnesses.**
- **The grave clothes were left behind**, with the head cloth folded by itself.
- **The risen Jesus had a real body of "flesh and bones"** and ate before them.
- **The risen Jesus called the Father "my God"** (John 20:17).
- **John wrote so that we would believe Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of God"** (John 20:31).

- **He was seen by more than five hundred at once.**
- **He ascended from the Mount of Olives after forty days**, and He will return in the same way.
- **Men killed Jesus; God raised Him** (Acts 2:23-24).

God's Will and Intent

- **God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son** (John 3:16).
- **God intended the Lamb to take away the sin of the world** — and He provided Him.
- **God heard His Son's cry** and did not leave Him in the grave (Psalm 16:10; 22:24).
- **God raised Jesus from the dead**, "because it was not possible that he should be holden of it."
- **God exalted Him to His own right hand**, "and given him a name which is above every name… to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:9-11).
- **God opened the way into His presence** — the veil torn from the top.
- **God poured out the gift of holy spirit** through the ascended Christ, to begin the administration of grace.
- **God will send His Son back** for His people, "and so shall we ever be with the Lord."