

CHAPTER 23

Overview of Luke 23

Chapters 23 and 24 record the most significant events in human history—the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Chapter 23 records His crucifixion and burial, and chapter 24 His resurrection and ascension. Chapter 23 begins with Jesus’ trials before Pilate and Herod, having already been condemned by the Sanhedrin (aka the “Council”). Pilate exonerates Jesus of any guilt, but the mob, aroused by the chief priests and scribes, demand Jesus’ crucifixion. Luke alone records some words by Jesus while He is carrying His cross, helped by a man named Simon of Cyrene. Luke then records some of the details of Jesus’ crucifixion, focusing only on the essentials of what his Gentile readers need to know. Luke also includes Jesus’ interaction with the two criminals crucified along with Him. After Jesus’ death on the cross, His body is taken down and placed in a tomb at the request of none other than a member of the Council named Joseph of Arimathea, “a righteous man.” Jesus’ burial takes place just before the Sabbath, the day of rest, leaving no time for His body to be prepared with “spices and perfumes” by some of His women followers.

What to look for in Luke 23

1. When Jesus is brought before Pontius Pilate by His accusers, look for the accusations that are true, and those that are not.
2. Look for the number of times Pilate finds “no guilt” in Jesus. How does that correspond to the time Jonah spent in the belly of the fish, to the number of statements Jesus makes while on the cross, and to the number of days Jesus spent in the tomb after His crucifixion?
3. Look for the irony behind the crowd’s demand for the release of a guilty man, and their demand for the punishment of an innocent man.
4. During the crucifixion, find the three statements Jesus makes, and to whom He makes them. Look for the significance of each.
5. Look for the irony of the interaction between Jesus and the two criminals crucified alongside Him.
6. Carefully observe the significance of the veil in the temple being “torn in two” when Jesus dies.
7. Look for the irony of the role of Joseph of Arimathea, and his fulfillment of an important prophecy in Isaiah.

1 Then the whole body of them got up and brought Him before Pilate.

23:1 The “whole body of them” refers to the Sanhedrin (i.e., the Council). The desire of the Council leaders is to get rid of Jesus by putting Him to death. However, only Rome had the authority to carry out capital punishment; Jewish authorities were not allowed to do so on their own. The plot by the Council, therefore, is devious. Whereas the Council could accuse Jesus before the ruling Roman authority without His followers knowing about it, it would have to be Pilate himself who ordered Jesus’ execution. From the Council’s point of view, the crowd who followed Jesus would blame Rome, not the Council, for His execution. One must remember that the crowd would not be privy to all the

interactions between the Council and Pilate; they would only witness Pilate's actions regarding Jesus.

Pilate was the fifth governor, or procurator, appointed to the districts of Judea, Samaria and Idumea (former Edom), having been appointed by his good friend Emperor Tiberius. Pilate governed from AD 26 to 36. His full name was Pontius Pilate, "Pontius" being his family name, and "Pilate" meaning "he who is armed with a javelin." (There is much irony here, as it was a spear, or *lonche*, that was used by the centurion to ensure that Jesus had died [John 19:34]). Pilate's primary concern was to oversee the collection of taxes and to put down any insurrections by Jews such as the Zealots. However, he was the cause of many of his own troubles. Pilate was quickly hated by the Jews because of his total disdain and disregard for things sacred to them. For example, he hung shields in the temple inscribed with the images of Roman gods. He confiscated temple taxes to build an aqueduct. He was also responsible for the incident recorded in Luke 13:1 about the Galileans "whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices," most likely referring to the murder of priests while they were offering sacrifices in the Holy Place. Such indiscretions caused great unrest among a nation that was already difficult to control, resulting in reports and complaints that were quickly relayed to Rome, thus jeopardizing his job.

(The reader will find more details of Jesus' trial before Pilate in Matthew 27:11-26, Mark 15:1-15, and John 18:28 to 19:16.)

2 And they began to accuse Him, saying, "We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, and saying that He Himself is Christ, a King."

3 So Pilate asked Him, saying, "Are You the King of the Jews?" And He answered him and said, "*It is as you say.*"

4 Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, "I find no guilt in this man."

5 But they kept on insisting, saying, "He stirs up the people, teaching all over Judea, starting from Galilee even as far as this place."

23:2-5 The accusations against Jesus by the Council in **verse 2** are a mixture of truth, misappropriated truth and outright lies. Such are the tactics of Satan and those under Satan's influence; if you don't have a good case, make one up by mixing truth with conjectures and falsehoods. The first accusation—"forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar"—is a lie. Luke makes sure his readers understand this by quoting what Jesus actually said in 20:25. The second accusation that "He Himself is Christ" is true; Jesus affirmed this to the Sanhedrin (22:70). The third accusation about being "a King" is a misappropriated truth. He is a king by virtue of being the Son of God, the Messiah, and He acknowledges this to Pilate (**v. 3**). However, as Jesus clearly informs Pilate in John 18:36: "My kingdom is not of this world." The point of the Council is to make Jesus appear that His kingdom *is* of this world and Jesus is someone who is a threat to Rome, and attempting to set up His own earthly kingdom. If this were true, it would result in immediate execution at the hands of the Roman authorities. When Pilate incredulously asks Jesus, "Are You the King of the Jews?" in **verse 3**, he is comparing Jesus to Herod who is the officially

designated King of the Jews, and to Caesar, who is king over everyone and everything. Jesus' answer, simply stated, is "Yes," or as John states, "You say correctly that I am a king" (19:37). Pilate must have chuckled.

In Luke's account, it doesn't take long for Pilate to realize that Jesus poses no threat to Rome: "I find no guilt in this man" (v. 4). Recorded only by Luke, this is the first of three occasions Pilate states that he finds "no guilt" in Jesus (see verses 14 and 22). That is, Pilate can find no grounds for condemning Jesus to death. All three accusations against Jesus are summarily dismissed. Yet "they kept on insisting" that Jesus' teaching is tantamount to insurrection, and that He has stirred up crowds from Galilee to Judea, all of whom are presently in Jerusalem for the Passover. Here, there is a bit of irony in their statement, "He stirs up the people." Jesus was indeed stirring up the people, but for all the right reasons. The people want a Messiah, and they will get a Messiah, but only on God's terms, not theirs.

The accusations against Jesus are not unlike the accusations those who oppose Christianity make up about Christians. In the early church, Christians were accused of cannibalism by taking the Lord's supper, which they called "the body and blood of Christ." In the Muslim world today, pastors and Christians in Iran and Pakistan are imprisoned on charges stemming from attempting to overthrow the government, to "insulting Islam," to committing blasphemy against the Koran. In Canada and America, Christians who oppose gay marriage are labeled bigots and "hate groups," and those who oppose abortion are accused of a "war on women." Christians who are the target of false accusations today should be comforted, not intimidated; we are given the privilege of entering into the sufferings of Jesus.

6 When Pilate heard it, he asked whether the man was a Galilean.

7 And when he learned that He belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent Him to Herod, who himself also was in Jerusalem at that time.

23:6-7 Pilate discovers a way out of his predicament by learning that Jesus is from Galilee, out of Pilate's jurisdiction. Whereas Pilate was procurator of Judea, Herod was tetrarch of Galilee and Perea. He therefore has Jesus sent to Herod "who himself also was in Jerusalem at the time." Pilate's headquarters was in Caesarea Philippi and Herod spent most of his time at his palace in Sepphoris near Nazareth. Both were in Jerusalem for the Passover in case there was trouble.

As stated earlier in this commentary (3:19-20), the Herod referred to here is Herod Antipas, the same Herod who had John the Baptist beheaded at the request of his stepdaughter, being prompted to do so by her mother, Herodias. (The Jewish historian Josephus identifies Herodias's daughter as Salome,

8 Now Herod was very glad when he saw Jesus; for he had wanted to see Him for a long time, because he had been hearing about Him and was hoping to see some sign performed by Him.

9 And he questioned Him at some length; but He answered him nothing.

10 And the chief priests and the scribes were standing there, accusing Him vehemently.

11 And Herod with his soldiers, after treating Him with contempt and mocking Him, dressed Him in a gorgeous robe and sent Him back to Pilate.

12 Now Herod and Pilate became friends with one another that very day; for before they had been enemies with each other.

and is not to be confused with the Salome who was a follower of Jesus [Mark 15:40; 16:1].)

23:8-12 The fact that Herod was “very glad” to see Jesus and “wanted to see Him for a long time” directly contradicts the warning by the Pharisees that Herod wanted to kill Him (13:31). As stated in that section, this was a ploy on the part of the Pharisees to keep Jesus out of Judea. That Herod wanted to “see some sign performed by Him” shows the complete lack of sincere investigation. Herod considered Jesus as no more than a well-known magician who, to get off the hook, might perform a “trick.”

Luke states that Herod “questioned Him at some length,” but that Jesus did not respond to his questions. The simple reason is that it would have been a waste of time and changed nothing. Herod was too depraved a man to have listened to anything Jesus had to say; after all, he hadn’t listened to anything John the Baptist had to say. Also, Herod had no authority to have Jesus crucified, and therefore Herod was merely a distraction from Jesus’ mission to go to the cross. Remember, too, that Herod wasn’t even a Jew...he was an Edomite, a perpetual enemy of the Jews over the centuries. He was a political puppet appointed by Rome by virtue of the dynasty established by his father, Herod the Great.

While Herod wants to see tricks, the chief priests and scribes want to see blood. Luke uses the word “vehemently,” meaning that they kept revving up the accusations against Jesus. Actually, Luke uses a medical term here that means “well-toned,” implying that the chief priests were not only more insistent and eloquent in their accusations, but they were refining them as they went. This scene should remind the reader of Zechariah 3:1-2 where it states, “Then he showed me Joshua the high priest, standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him....” In Revelation 12:10, Satan is described as “the accuser of our brethren.” That Jesus did not answer Herod and His accusers fulfills Isaiah 53:7: “He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth.”

Verse 11 provides little detail as to how Herod and his soldiers treated Jesus “with contempt.” It is doubtful that physical abuse was employed here, and the implication is that the room was filled with laughter, scorn, insults and “mocking” for having been called “the king of the Jews.” This theory is supported by the fact that the soldiers “dressed Him in a gorgeous robe.” The word for “gorgeous” is *lampran* from which the English word “lamp” comes. It refers to something bright or brilliant. Some commentators suggest that this was a different robe than the one gambled over at the foot of the cross, which Mark calls “purple” and Matthew calls

“scarlet,” implying a military robe. Regardless, the point is made: the robe placed on Jesus by Herod was an expensive robe on any level. There are two great ironies here. The first is that by placing a king’s robe on Jesus, Herod is in effect transferring his kingship onto Jesus. The second irony is that the robe was indeed befitting a king, but the tragedy is that it was donned with scorn, mockery and total disrespect.

Verse 12 interjects that from that moment on, Pilate and Herod “became friends with one another.” The context for this statement was a long-standing distrust and rivalry between Pilate and Herod. Herod, related to the Jewish nation and a son of Herod the Great, had been tetrarch longer than Pilate, who was a Roman citizen. Neither trusted one another until now. Pilate acknowledged Herod’s authority by deferring Jesus to him, and Herod acknowledged Pilate’s authority as the one who was ultimately in control of the nation.

From a theological perspective, however, it was necessary that Jesus be rejected by both the Jewish nation, represented by Herod, and the rest of the world, represented by Pilate. This “double rejection” is summed up nicely by the apostle John in his gospel: “He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him” (John 1:10-11). So, it was not just the Jews who rejected Jesus, it was the whole world, as it is the whole world today that rejects Jesus, not just the Jewish nation. Therefore, by being rejected by the whole world, Jesus’ death on the cross covers the sins of the whole world, not just the Jewish nation.

13 Pilate summoned the chief priests and the rulers and the people,

14 and said to them, “You brought this man to me as one who incites the people to rebellion, and behold, having examined Him before you, I have found no guilt in this man regarding the charges which you make against Him.

15 “No, nor has Herod, for he sent Him back to us; and behold, nothing deserving death has been done by Him.

16 “Therefore I will punish Him and release Him.”

17 [Now he was obliged to release to them at the feast one prisoner.]

23:13-17 Pilate’s attempt to pass the buck to Herod had failed. Herod had little to gain by granting the wishes of the chief priests and scribes, as he already held them in contempt, as they did him. Besides, he was already in hot water with the people for having John the Baptist beheaded. (Having John beheaded was not a form of capital punishment; it was more an in-house crime of passion against a man who embarrassed and agitated the king.) Pilate therefore “summoned” Jesus’ accusers in an attempt to reason with them. He clearly informs them that he cannot find “guilt” in Him; that is, Pilate is unable to find Jesus guilty of inciting rebellion among the people. This is the second time Pilate states that he finds “no guilt in this man.” Pilate’s solution to the enigma that neither he nor Herod have found any cause for execution is to submit Jesus to Roman scourging in hopes that will satisfy the accusers, as Roman scourging was extremely severe and sometimes resulted in death.

18 But they cried out all together, saying, “Away with this man, and release for us Barabbas!”

19 (He was one who had been thrown into prison for an insurrection made in the city, and for murder.)

Verse 17 indicates that the mob was aware of the Roman tradition of releasing one prisoner at Passover. (The origin of this tradition is unknown.) This custom is well attested (e.g., Mark 15:6). From Pilate’s perspective, following this custom would be a way out from him condemning an innocent man. Unfortunately for Pilate (yet fortunate for us), the mob is unwilling to go along with Pilate’s suggestion.

[Verse 17 is placed in brackets by the NASB editors because it is not found in the earliest manuscripts. Technically, it is called a “gloss”; that is, it may have been written as a marginal note that was later incorporated into the manuscript. It was apparently inserted to (1) help readers understand the context of releasing a prisoner at Passover, and (2) to provide consistency with Matt. 27:15. As with almost all verses like this, it has no bearing on Christian theology or in the authenticity and authority of the gospel, and is intended to explain verse 16; that is, to help the reader understand why Pilate would be inclined to “release Him.”]

23:18-25 Once again, Pilate is caught between a rock and a hard place. His sense of Roman justice is being challenged by his need to keep calm among the people. By this time, a mob has gathered, no doubt being revved up by the chief priests. However, this mob is comprised of more than those simply conspiring with the chief priests. The mob has grown to include those who want revolution. In any oppressed society, there is always an underlying unrest among the people who want to be out from under the oppression, but are held at bay by superior force. It doesn’t take much of a trigger to inflame the passions of the oppressed. The irony here is that Jesus came to set the oppressed free. Now, the oppressed are calling for His death in favor of a man who could never set them free. They shout in unison like a great chant: “Release for us Barabbas!”

Barabbas means “son of abba” (“son of daddy”) and should not be confused with “Barsabbas” in Acts 1:23 and 15:22. All four gospel writers refer to Barabbas by name. Matthew identifies Barabbas as “a notorious prisoner” (27:16), John as a “robber” (18:40), and Luke, an insurrectionist and murderer. Virtually nothing is known of Barabbas other than what is recorded in the gospels. The passion of the people, however, indicate that he was extremely well known and seen as a hero, being the leader of an insurrection. Do you see the irony here? First, Barabbas’s name tells us nothing about the man, and he could be anybody. Therefore, he is a type of mankind who is truly guilty of sin but is delivered from death by virtue of the substitution of the One who is not guilty, Jesus the Messiah. Second, the mob is giving up the true Deliverer for one who in the end,

20 Pilate, wanting to release Jesus, addressed them again,

21 but they kept on calling out, saying, “Crucify, crucify Him!”

22 And he said to them the third time, “Why, what evil has this man done? I have found in Him no guilt *demanding* death; therefore I will punish Him and release Him.”

23 But they were insistent, with loud voices asking that He be crucified. And their voices *began* to prevail.

24 And Pilate pronounced sentence that their demand be granted.

can deliver no one. There is a great lesson here for all followers of Jesus Christ. Jesus, and Jesus alone, can deliver us from our oppressors and from our oppressions, for He alone is the only One who can deliver us from our sins, from the schemes of Satan, and from the woes and wiles of the world. The worldly mob is looking for a worldly answer; they are blinded to the fact that the true answer is in their very midst. The world will do anything to avoid the message of the cross because to face the cross is to face one’s guilt from personal sin. Unfortunately, many churches in America today are bypassing the message of the cross in favor of the gospel of happiness, care-free living, and the avoidance of sacrifice and suffering. Luke’s message that Jesus and Jesus alone delivers us from sin and eternal condemnation is being pushed aside in favor of the feel-good message of Christian self-actualization, happiness and cheap grace. Mobs remains with us today, but instead of shouting, “release for us Barabbas,” the crowd demands “release for us the megastar!”

Pilate, quite frustrated by this time, and having been warned by his wife not to shed innocent blood (Matt. 27:19), addresses the mob a third time. Luke clearly indicates that Pilate wanted to release Jesus. Up until now, Pilate’s sense of justice has prevailed, but is slowly being worn down by the mob. At this point, the crowd not only demands Barabbas be released but, stirred up by the religious leaders, they demand that Jesus be crucified: “Crucify, crucify Him!” The form of the words “calling out” means the mob was continually shouting, as if in a chant. It is unclear how the mob went from exchanging Barabbas’s imprisonment to crucifying Jesus. Certainly, the chief priests and scribes must have had something to do with it, for they did not just want Jesus in prison...they wanted Him dead. By having the mob shout “Crucify Him,” they not only wanted Him dead, but they wanted Him to suffer terribly, as we will see later in the chapter.

The word “crucify” is *staurou* and comes from a word meaning “to stake,” as one would stake a fence using an upright piece of wood. To crucify someone is to stake him to an upright piece of wood. “Crucify” is the verb form; “crucifixion” is the noun.

Here Pilate attempts to reason with an out-of-control mob, a lose-lose situation at best. Rather than simply declaring Jesus is innocent, he asks an extremely relevant, if not rhetorical question: “What evil has this man done?” The word “evil” is *kakon* meaning “bad things” or “harm to others.” The phrasing of the question in the Greek indicates that this is both an explanatory and argumentative question combined. That is, he is explaining that there is no evil found in Him, and therefore, what’s

their argument for demanding crucifixion? The obvious answer is “None.” This is the third time that Pilate states he can find “no guilt” in Jesus, especially that warranting crucifixion. So, once again, he attempts to appease the mob by offering to scourge Him. That is not good enough for the mob, for Pilate has included his intent to “release Him.”

Verse 23 indicates that their shouts “began to prevail”; that is, prevail over Pilate’s pleas, prevail over reason, and prevail over any sense of justice.

Pilate now finds himself caught in a web from which he cannot extricate himself. He is caught between condemning to death a man in whom he can find no fault, and setting himself up for more complaints to Rome when he hears the crowd shout, “If you release this Man, you are no friend of Caesar; everyone who makes himself out to be a king opposes Caesar” (John 19:12).

It is **verse 24**, however, that tells the tale. Pilate, against his better judgment, against all sense of Roman justice, and against the dire warnings of his wife, acquiesces to the mob: he “pronounced sentence that their demand be granted.”

“That their demand be granted” is the Achilles heel of all good leaders; that is, to please the crowd at the expense of justice and good judgment. Politicians routinely yield to the demand of the noisy few or the perks of special interest groups for the sake of winning votes and appearing “open to all.” In America today, there is no greater example of this than the government’s yielding to the gay agenda and the demand for same-sex marriage. Politicians proclaim they support it even though in their hearts they are against it; they do not want to be labeled “homophobic.” Today, the “mob” is represented by the liberal media, and the politician is a type of Pilate, acquiescing to the will of the mob, that “their demand be granted.”

Unfortunately, church leaders sometimes fall into this same trap by trying to keep everyone in the congregation happy, rather than defining a biblical standard and sticking to it no matter the cost. There is no greater example of this than the so-called “seeker sensitive” approach to church ministry, which is another way of saying that the church should become more like the world, rather than the world becoming more like Christ. Pastors, instead of expositing and explaining the word have become charismatic entertainers employing expensive multimedia and all the trappings of the entertainment industry. Not satisfied with a body of believers that is an inch wide but a mile deep spiritually, the body of Christ has become a mile wide and an inch deep. Churches have conformed to the demands and whims of the culture rather than to making true disciples, those who are willing to take up their cross, suffer

25 And he released the man they were asking for who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, but he delivered Jesus to their will.

and sacrifice for the sake of Jesus. Studies show that Bible illiteracy among so-called evangelical Christians is at an all-time high. The list could go on and on, but the cause is simple: the church has taken the position regarding the crowd, “that their demand be granted.” And once again, Jesus is being led away to the cross, this time not by the world, but by the church.

The result of Pilate’s acquiescence? “He released the man they were asking for.” In other words, he chose to please the crowd, something a pastor or church leader must never do. And the cost of that? “He delivered Jesus to their will.” It’s a deliverance of the most evil kind.

There has been no greater degradation of Jesus in the American church today than delivering Him to the will of a Christian culture that is becoming increasingly narcissistic. Christians do not want a suffering Jesus; they want a Jesus who will make them happy. They do not want a Jesus for whom they must sacrifice; they want a Jesus who will bring good feelings and sentiments without sacrifice. Many Christians today do not want a Jesus who demands obedience; they want a Jesus who will cater to their wish-list. They want the Jesus that is fun, non-judgmental, demands little, and costs nothing. In an effort to build large churches, some pastors have sold out to the world and its methodologies for success. Where is the church that teaches its members to pray? Where is the church that explains the word of God in such a way that its members can explain the word to others? Where is the church that sends more money to missionaries than it spends on multimedia, sound systems or stage lighting? Where is the church that holds its members accountable for their sexual sins, and disciplines those who choose a lifestyle that is inconsistent with walking in the Spirit? Where is the church that teaches true biblical love as much as it teaches about social ills or end-times philosophies? Where is the church whose members weep in repentance at the altar for sins past and present? Where is the church that makes disciples instead of mere observers? Where is the church who weeps over Christians who are being persecuted and martyred in Muslim countries? There are churches like that, to be sure, but their numbers are dwindling and their presence is rarely noted, for they are not “on the cutting edge” or “mega-.” It is unlikely that a so-called megachurch is making more disciples of Jesus than it is worshippers of the celebrity or rock-star pastor. Yet, like the seven thousand in Elijah’s day who had not bowed their knees to Baal, so, too, does God preserve a remnant. Unfortunately, the remnant is difficult to find.

The lesson here is clear: pastors must not deliver Jesus to the will of the people or the culture. The

church is commissioned to deliver the message that will bring people to Jesus Christ, not Jesus to the mob. The church must not become like the world or attempt to please the crowd. The church would do well, therefore, to direct its attention to the cross, for only there can the true Deliverer be found.

There is a large ellipsis (omission) by Luke between verses 25 and 26, and that involves Jesus' scourging by the Romans. It is probably omitted because it has already been referred to in the previous verses, and any Gentile reader would automatically know that scourging was a severe punishment administered prior to crucifixion itself. Much has been written about Roman scourging in Christian literature, but little is known about it by the average Christian; therefore, it is mentioned here.

Roman scourging was known for its cruelty and severity. When Jews performed flogging (they never scourged), it was carried out with three leather straps attached to a wooden handle, and by Jewish law, a criminal could receive no more than 40 lashes. In order to avoid violating the law, the principle was "forty save one" meaning 39, thus avoiding the mistake of losing count, giving too many lashes, and thereby breaking the law. But such was not the case with Roman scourging, which carried with it the description of "near death." Scourging was actually a punishment reserved for criminals. Therefore, crucifixion may or may not have followed scourging. Because scourging was so severe, it was against Roman law to carrying out scourging on one of its own citizens. The victim would be tied by the hand on an upright stake in the standing position, thus exposing the chest and stomach areas as well as the back. The Romans used leather straps attached to a wooden handle as well, but to the leather straps were attached sharp rocks and pieces of metal or bone. These straps were longer than the Jewish flagellum, and instead of simply lashing the back, the straps would whip around the chest and abdominal region, ripping the chest and abdominal wall when they were quickly and forcefully yanked back by the executioner. Often muscles or even internal organs were exposed as a result of the tearing of the skin. And, unlike Jewish flogging, Roman scourging had no limit to the number of times the criminal could be whipped. The scourging Jesus received fulfills Isaiah's prophecy, "By His scourging we are healed" (Isa. 53:5).

Also not mentioned by Luke is the placing of a crown of thorns on Jesus' head, the cloaking of Jesus with a purple robe, and the demeaning actions by the soldiers who slapped Him and sarcastically mocking Him as the King of the Jews.

According to the John's gospel, Pilate brought out Jesus to the crowd after His scourging (John 19:1-

26 When they led Him away, they seized a man, Simon of Cyrene, coming in from the country, and placed on him the cross to carry behind Jesus.

6). Some commentators suspect Pilate may have been trying to create sympathy for Jesus so that he could release him. Obviously, the plan didn't work.

(For the other gospel writers' account of Jesus' scourging, see Matt. 27:26-28, Mark 15:15-17, and John 19:1-6, 19.)

23:26 All three synoptic writers mention Simon. He was from Cyrene, a city in North Africa (modern-day Libya), where there was a large Jewish community. It seems likely that he was on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the Passover. Acts mentions that Christian Cyrenians were actively involved in the spread of the gospel following Pentecost, and were partly responsible for establishing the church in Antioch (Acts 11:20). Mark mentions that Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus (15:21). It is probable that the Rufus mentioned by Paul in Romans 16:13 is this same Rufus, as Christian tradition holds that both sons of Simon became missionaries. Some have speculated that Simon was a Gentile proselyte, and that he was black. There is no real evidence for this, and the conjecture is probably more one of political expedience than truth.

The type of cross referred to in verse 26 is unknown. The cross (Latin *crux*, Greek *stauros*) could have been one of two forms. If it were the traditional cross celebrated by Christianity (aka the "Latin cross," *crux immissa*), it would have weighed between 200 and 300 pounds. Arriving at the site of execution, a hole would have had to be dug if there was not one already. The criminal would have been laid down, nailed to the cross and then the entire cross with the body attached to it would have had to be lifted up by soldiers and dropped into the hole, quite a heavy chore. The other possibility—and the most probable one—is that Jesus was carrying only the crossbar weighing about 30 or 40 pounds (called a *patibulum*) which, after the victim was nailed and tied, was hoisted up and laid atop the upright beam, therefore forming a "T" shape. (This type of cross was called a *crux commissa*, aka "Saint Anthony's Cross.") Whether the cross was the traditional one or the "T" shape is unimportant. What is important is that Jesus is demonstrating what it means to be a true citizen of the kingdom of God, and what it will take to follow Him. Notice that verse 26 ends with "and placed on him the cross to carry *behind Jesus*" (italics mine). Simon is *following Jesus*. Unbeknownst to Simon, he is fulfilling Jesus' teaching about the cost of following Him: "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me" (Luke 9:23; 14:27). Note, too, that Simon didn't rush up to the soldiers and volunteer to carry Jesus' cross. He was "seized"; that is, grabbed at random out of the crowd and forced to carry the

27 And following Him was a large crowd of the people, and of women who were mourning and lamenting Him.

28 But Jesus turning to them said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, stop weeping for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.

29 “For behold, the days are coming when they will say, ‘Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed.’

30 “Then they will begin TO SAY TO THE MOUNTAINS, ‘FALL ON US,’ AND TO THE HILLS, ‘COVER US.’

31 “For if they do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?”

cross. Who knows how much Simon knew about Jesus before he was grabbed by the soldiers, but the incident obviously made a lifelong impression on him, if Christian tradition is correct that he became an evangelist in Cyrene.

The lesson here is clear: Jesus did not ask His disciples to do anything He was unwilling to do Himself. Not only was He beaten, He was mocked, made fun of, treated with scorn, made to suffer, and eventually died at the hands of ruthless, godless men. This is the price Jesus says may cost anyone who chooses to follow Him. This very day, Christians all over the world are being evicted out of their homes and businesses, expelled from countries, imprisoned, beaten and often killed simply for being a follower of Jesus Christ. Knowing this, the reader of this commentary, therefore, is now under obligation to pay attention to the suffering of Christians around the world and pray for them that their faith may not fail. And, in the worse case scenario, the reader is now under obligation to carry his or her own cross, regardless of the cost, regardless of the suffering, regardless of the price. We are all called to be Simons of Cyrene.

23:27-31 Verses 27-31 are found only in Luke. Luke records this most likely because of he has often emphasized the role and presence of women throughout Jesus’ ministry. (There are eight specific references that focus on women.) The large crowd following Jesus was probably a mix of some of His disciples, including women disciples such as Mary Magdalene, Joanna and Susanna, and a group of professional mourners who commonly accompanied Jewish prisoners being led to execution. That is why Jesus does not address them by name, but as “Daughters of Jerusalem.” Verses 28-31 contain Jesus’ last prophecy concerning the fate of Jerusalem. Note that Jesus does not put a date on these events, but instead reiterates what He has already warned about before (21:20-24). That Luke includes these verses demonstrates that Jesus continues to be concerned about those women who will be victims of the fall of Jerusalem at the hand of the Romans in AD 70. One further note about women: nowhere in the gospels does any woman show hostility to Jesus.

Jesus, the All-Compassionate One, informs the women that they should “stop weeping for Me.” This instruction is so emphatic that, in the Greek, it is presented as a command, implying that the women absolutely need to be more concerned about their own fate than Jesus’ because their future is so grim. Things will be so bad that women will actually say, “Blessed are the barren...” when barrenness for a married woman was considered a curse and punishment by God. In **verse 30**, therefore, Jesus

quotes directly from Hosea 10:8. Why is that significant? Because the context for Hosea's prophecy has to do with *retribution for Israel's sin*. Included in this portion of Hosea's prophecy are the very words shouted by the mob calling for Jesus' crucifixion: "Surely now they will say, 'We have no king, for we do not revere the Lord'" (Hos. 10:3). And, at the end of Hosea 10, he writes: "...When mothers were dashed in pieces with their children, thus it will be done to you at Bethel because of your great wickedness, at dawn the king of Israel will be completely cut off" (10:14-15). ("Bethel" means "house of God.") This warning by Jesus is clearly an explanation for the destruction of Jerusalem—their rejection of the Messiah.

Verses 31 is a common proverb that means, "If the Romans do these terrible things to the innocent Jesus ("tree is green"), what will happen to the guilty Jews ("dry")? Or, possibly: "If the Romans treat Israel this way when the Messiah is present, what will happen when He is not present and judgment comes?"

From an eschatological perspective (end times), there is a possible application: If the world is this wicked when the church is present, what will it be like when the church is no longer present (because of the rapture)?

From a very practical perspective that all Christians can relate to today, there is another real application: "If you think life is tough when you have Jesus, think what it would be like if you didn't have Him to turn to?"

32 Two others also, who were criminals, were being led away to be put to death with Him.

23:32 Luke ensures the reader understands that the two others who were about to be crucified next to Jesus are indeed criminals, getting what they deserve. The clear implication is that Jesus was not a criminal, yet being treated like one, and therefore getting what He does not deserve. This verse prepares the reader for what Luke will record in verses 39-43.

33 When they came to the place called The Skull, there they crucified Him and the criminals, one on the right and the other on the left.

23:33-38 Oh, the volume of significance in this one verse! First, let's deal with the criminals on either side. The picture is clear: Jesus' presence divides men spiritually. As we will see, one will find salvation, the other probably not. Why? Because of what they believe about Jesus and who He is. We will go into that in more detail in verses 39-43.

Second, "they came to the place called The Skull." The name of the hill (probably a mound along a thoroughfare) was called Golgotha, which is an Aramaic word meaning "skull." (The Latin word for skull is *calvarius* from which we get the word "Calvary.") Obviously, this little hill appeared like a skull from a certain perspective, and it was probably

a common site for the crucifixion of criminals. There is no certainty today about its exact location.

Third, “they crucified Him.” The very word itself is the epitome of suffering, agony and shame. Invented by the Assyrians, the victims were simply impaled on a stake by running the pointed end through the rectum and into the chest cavity. Death was almost immediate and, besides punishing the enemy, served as a warning display to passers-by. This cruel act of brutality was picked up by the Phoenicians, Carthaginians, and Egyptians. The Romans, however, devised a method of making crucifixion a slow, agonizing punishment and death that often took days.

There were basically two methods of crucifixion, and sometimes the two were mixed, depending on the circumstances and who was in charge of the execution. In some cases, 3/8 inch nails were driven through the palm of the hands (the traditional portrayal). However, the hand would rip out of the nail when body weight was factored in. Therefore, to prevent this from happening, the upper arms were lashed to the crossbar with a rope. The feet, of course, were nailed onto a small ledge as well. (More about this in a moment.) The advantage of this first method involving where the nails were placed in the hands is that the crucifixion was prolonged by virtue of the ropes holding up the body weight.

The other method involving the hands was exceedingly more painful and damaging to the body. Instead of the nails being driven through the palms, the nails were driven through the wrists (carpal bones) where there are many strong ligaments. This ensured that the hand would not pull free of the nail when the body was lifted up, and therefore, ropes were not necessary. Whereas there are virtually no major nerves or arteries running through the palm of the hand, two major nerves and arteries run through the narrower wrist. Such severe damage to the wrists would probably paralyze the hands permanently (which, therefore, would make it virtually impossible for Jesus to have rolled the stone away from the tomb Himself). This method also increased the suffering of being hung on a cross, for with the body weight pulling on the shoulders, they would eventually dislocate (gleno-humeral joint separation).

Concerning the feet, nails were sometimes placed immediately in front of the Achilles tendon between it and the heel (calcaneus), but this caused the lower extremities to be turned at the hips, therefore making it more difficult to push oneself up for relief on the arms. More commonly, however, a nail was driven directly through the middle of the forefeet (metacarpals) with one foot overlapping the other. The knees were slightly bent so that the victim could use them to push up on the ledge for relief. The

nails in the feet (and hands) could be driven without breaking any bones. And in those days, there was no medical terminology distinction between the hand and the wrists. Therefore, when Jesus showed the disciples “His hands” after the resurrection, He could have actually been showing them His wrists. (We will not know this for sure until we see Him in heaven.)

The purpose for bending the knees when the nails were driven into the feet was to prolong the agony. The pain from the nails in the hands (wrists) would refer to the shoulders and chest muscles (called referred pain), causing them to cramp up and go into spasm, thus interfering with breathing. To take the weight off the arms, therefore, the victim would push up on the feet so as to be able to breathe. This, of course, resulted in more pain the feet, causing the pain to be referred up into the thighs and hips. The muscles in the thigh (quadriceps) and hip (gluteal muscles, to name a few) would therefore go into spasm, eventually weakening to the point that the victim could no longer hold himself up, therefore slumping down again letting all the body weight hang on the arms. Thus, a cycle of agony that could last for days. That is why Roman crucifixion was referred to as “slow death.”

That’s some of the physical aspects of crucifixion. Now let’s look at some of the spiritual aspects. Being hung on a cross was a symbol of being cursed in Jewish tradition, and while Jesus was on the cross, He was under a curse, and indeed, became a curse for us. Paul makes this clear in Galatians 3:13: “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’” (Deut. 21:23). The point Paul is making is that those who are under the law are under a curse because no one can ever live up to it—righteousness cannot be obtained through the law. But Jesus fulfilled “all the Law and the Prophets,” yet He took upon Himself the curse that should have been meted out to all of us. Thus, He became a curse for us.

Not only was being treated like a criminal shameful, but hanging on a cross was a symbol of shame, both from the Roman and from the Jewish point of view. (This, of course, is reflected in many Christian hymns, such as “The Old Rugged Cross.”) The writer of Hebrews makes this shame connection clear: “...Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb. 12:2). It is why Peter and John rejoiced after they were flogged and released by Jewish authorities: “So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that

34 But Jesus was saying, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.” And they cast lots, dividing up His garments among themselves.

they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name” (Acts 5:41).

And of course, the cross is the fulfillment of both Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53. (The reader would do well to reread these chapters to look for the prophecies concerning Christ’s crucifixion.)

Luke excludes many of the details of Jesus’ time on the cross. These can be found in Matthew 27:33-56; Mark 15:22-41, and John 19:16-37.

27:34 Here again, Luke creates another ellipsis. He records only three of Jesus’ seven statements while on the cross. The first of these, Luke wants his readers to know, contain some of the most important words Jesus ever spoke: “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.” It is a prayer of intercession, not just for those nailing Him to the cross, but for the whole world.

God the Father would have had every right to wipe out all of humanity at this very moment in time. His Beloved Son, in Whom He was well pleased, had done nothing to deserve this treatment. All Jesus had done was to bring good news to lost people, heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons from the possessed, raise the dead, and speak truth as to how to have a right relationship with God. He had never broken any Mosaic law, and therefore was without sin. He mended the broken-hearted, gave hope to the fainthearted, lifted the spirits of the oppressed, set prisoners free from the bondage of sin, and presented the Father to all people in such a way that they could understand that God loved them and wanted the kingdom of God in their hearts. He had offended only the proud, and chastised only the religious hypocrites. He taught His followers how to pray, how to trust in God for all their needs, how to share the good news, how to forgive others, how to love one another, and how to manifest the kingdom of God to a lost world. For this he was scourged and crucified, all because He did not give the world what it wanted, and only gave it what was needed but refused to accept. God the Father had sent His Son into the world because He love the world, but world had not received Him and instead nailed Him to the cross in the most painful and agonizing way. To be fair and just, God should have wiped out all mankind for what they (we) did to His Son. But He did not. Instead, He heeded the words of His Son, “Father, forgive them...” And God the Father offered the forgiveness of sins for the whole world in the name of His Son. Is this not love? Is this not the kind of love that could only come from the God of love? Is this not a grace that far outdistances anything the world could offer or even comprehend? Instead of judgment, God forgave. Instead of wrath, God held back. Instead of taking vengeance, God took mercy because “they do

not know what they are doing.” God knew the consequences for judging mankind at that point in time—all mankind would have spent eternity in hell. All mankind would have been separated from Him and His love forever. So God chose to listen to the intercession of His Son, and forgive, and allow mankind a chance to live forever in His presence.

If anyone asks why Christians must suffer, the answer is simple: because Jesus suffered, and because God the Father suffered when He witnessed the cruel death of His only Begotten Son on the cross.

But the forgiveness that God gave at the cross has its consequences. God said in effect, “I will forgive you, but only if you acknowledge that Jesus is My Son, the Son of God, the Messiah, the Savior of the world, and try to live a life that is in accordance with His teachings. If you accept my Son as your personal Savior, I will forgive you of all your sins, past, present and future. And I will send you a Helper so that you may live a life in accordance with His teachings, the Holy Spirit. But there will be a price to pay. The price will be that I will ask you to suffer and sacrifice the way I and My Son suffered and sacrificed, even to the point of death. In return, I will give you a full and abundant life on this earth, and I will give you eternal life when you die, a life forever in My presence and in the presence of My Son, and you will have great joy forever and ever.”

Christians often speak of God’s unconditional love. That is true in that He accepts us as we are. He accepts us when we’ve sinned, and He accepts us in our depravity. However, even though His unconditional love extends to all people everywhere, the benefits and blessings of His unconditional love do not extend to those who reject His Son. Why? Because He, God the Father, paid such a terrible price to offer that unconditional love. Therefore, not all men and women will receive the reward of eternal life. His love is unconditional, but the benefits are not. One must understand that very clearly. To receive the benefits and accept the grace offered, one must choose to receive and follow the Son.

Luke’s following statement is a comment on how far removed the world was from knowing who they had just crucified: “And they cast lots, dividing up His garments among themselves.” This action, of course, fulfills King David’s prophecy found in Psalm 22:18, written over 900 years before: “They divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.” This incident is a vivid picture of how far removed the world is from knowing Jesus and what He did on the cross. The soldiers are like the world, without concern for the suffering, without compassion, without remorse, concerned only about daily incidentals, and gambling on happiness based on material things.

35 And the people stood by, looking on. And even the rulers were sneering at Him, saying, “He saved others; let Him save Himself if this is the Christ of God, His Chosen One.”

36 The soldiers also mocked Him, coming up to Him, offering Him sour wine,

37 and saying, "If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself!"

38 Now there was also an inscription above Him, "THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS."

39 One of the criminals who were hanged *there* was hurling abuse at Him, saying, "Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!"

40 But the other answered, and rebuking him said, "Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?"

41 "And we indeed *are suffering* justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong."

42 And he was saying, "Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!"

43 And He said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise."

23:35-38 Verses 35-38 also fulfill David's prophecy in Psalm 22, and Luke wants his readers to understand one of the proofs that Jesus is the Messiah: "But I am a worm and not a man, a reproach of men and despised by the people. All who see me sneer at me; they separate with the lip, they wag the head saying, 'Commit yourself to the Lord; let him deliver him; let him rescue him....' For dogs have surrounded me; a band of evildoers have encompassed me; they pierced my hands and my feet. I can count all my bones. They look, they stare at me..." (Psalm 22:6-8, 16-17).

Verse 35 notes that "even the rulers" were present, mocking Him. These would have been the same rulers of the temple and synagogues. The irony of their statement, "He saved others; let Him save Himself..." is that Jesus could not save Himself *and* save the whole world. Why? Because the sins of the whole world needed to be atoned for by the shedding of blood, as the writer of Hebrews points out: "...And without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness." (See Hebrews 9:11-28 for the entire context.) And, it should not be forgotten, this was the Passover.

Verse 36 states that the soldiers offered Jesus "sour wine." This would have been wine that had partially turned to vinegar (*posca*), and carried by Roman soldiers who rarely drank water due to gastrointestinal consequences. Matthew states that Jesus had been offered "sour wine mingled with gall" at the very beginning, but He refused it (Matt. 27:34). The "gall" would have been myrrh mixed in, which is quite bitter to the taste. According to Proverbs 31:6, "strong drink" was given to those who were suffering, as it was considered a form of analgesia. The sour wine still had significant alcohol content. This incident recorded here by Luke was probably the same incident recorded by John just before Jesus died (John 19:28-30).

Concerning the inscription Pilate had written, more detail on this is found in John 19:19-22.

23:39-43 Only Luke records in detail Jesus' interaction with the two criminals crucified with Him. Both Matthew and Mark state that *both* criminals reviled Jesus (Matt 27:44). The general consensus by commentators is that one of those criminals later repented. Luke would be particularly prone to not overlook the repentant criminal's request, for the act of repentance is important to Luke's theme and relates all the way back to the ministry of John the Baptist (Luke 3:3).

"Was hurling" is in the imperfect tense, indicating that the one criminal kept on insisting Jesus save them. The word "hurling abuse" is a strong word which the KJV translates "railing." The word is

blasphemeo from which we get the word “blaspheme.” In other words, the criminal was effectively criticizing and rebuking Jesus in an angry manner. Note, too, that his interest is really not in Jesus, but in himself: “Save Yourself and us!” What is interesting in this rebuke is the criminal is actually assuming that Jesus is indeed the Messiah: “Are You not the Christ?” There is no reason to believe that this criminal thought otherwise, making his rebuke all the more serious and poignant. The point is that factually believing that Jesus is the Christ alone is not sufficient to find salvation. One must not only believe that Jesus is the Christ, and that He can save us, but that we are willing to submit to Him as Lord of our lives. In short, putting one’s faith and trust in Jesus.

After the ongoing insistence by the first criminal, nothing has changed. Jesus remains on the cross. The fate of all of three of them is sealed. The second criminal apparently comes to his senses (like the prodigal son) and realizes that death is inevitable, and that Jesus is going to die just like the rest of them. He first turns on his fellow criminal and rebukes him (*epitimaō*, to rebuke or reprove). His rebuke is poignant as well: “Do you not even fear God...?” The implication is that this second criminal also realizes that Jesus is the Messiah. He rebukes the first criminal because, if he really believes that Jesus is the Messiah, then to revile Him is to revile God Himself. He is thus adding to his sins by committing blasphemy and, as he is already justly sentenced to death, now is not a good time to be committing blasphemy. (“Sentence of condemnation” refers to a legal judgment [*krima*] issued by a court.)

That the second criminal is repentant comes out in **verse 41**: “We indeed are suffering justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds...” The essence of repentance is acknowledging our sin, not only against God, but against others. We do not know exactly what sins these criminals had committed, but they must have been serious enough to warrant crucifixion, and if the Romans considered them criminals for violating Roman law, then one can assume that they had broken many of the Ten Commandments. The second criminal’s acknowledge of his sin is the essence of repentance. It is the act of taking an honest look at oneself, at one’s actions, behaviors and relationships, and comparing them to God’s standards. Just like this second criminal, we find that we cannot measure up. Therefore, as the apostle Paul states, “...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). By acknowledging “we are receiving what we deserve,” he is confessing what every sinner on earth should confess—we deserve to die for our sins. He then acknowledges the contrast: the criminals are getting what they deserve, but Jesus is getting what

He does not deserve. In summary, verse 41 could read, “We’re getting what we deserve, but He doesn’t deserve what He is getting.”

Verse 42 could be called “the sinner’s prayer.” Having acknowledged his sin, that he deserves to suffer and die, and that he has little time left on this earth, he calls for mercy. That the text reads, “he was saying” indicates that he may have repeated the request a number of times. The first criminal has demanded that Jesus get them down off the cross. That didn’t happen, so the second criminal realizes it is a futile request, and that they are all going to die. In desperation, therefore, and perhaps as a last gasp of hope, he turns to the only option he has left: to request to be included in the kingdom of God. All the elements for being saved are now complete: he acknowledged that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; he acknowledges that he is a sinner and worthy of his judgment; finally, he turns to Jesus for the only escape, which is life after death in the kingdom of God. What exactly the criminal was thinking when he requested “Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom” is not known. However, what we do know is that he acknowledges that Jesus is the Messiah who will eventually establish His kingdom on earth. There is such irony here! Jesus’ disciples have abandoned Him. Their assumption that Jesus would establish His earthly kingdom is over. Their hopes have been dashed and they are wandering around in confusion and disillusionment, disappointed, discouraged and distraught. They have been unwilling to suffer with Him, and therefore have lost hope in His kingdom to come. But the criminal, who is suffering with Jesus, believes His kingdom is real and is yet to be manifested! Jesus will not let this criminal die without hope: “Today you shall be with Me in Paradise.”

There are a number of things that need to be said about **verse 43**. First, the word “Paradise” is used in only two other places in the New Testament. First, 2 Corinthians 12:4, where Paul describes his journey to “the third heaven” which he describes as Paradise. (It is also found in Rev. 2:7, reading “I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.”) In the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament), the word Paradise (*paradeiso*) is used to describe the Garden of Eden, and originally meant “an enclosed park” and “pleasure-ground.” In Jewish theology, it was the equivalent of “Abraham’s bosom” (Luke 16:22). But the key phrase here is not “in Paradise,” but “you shall be with Me.” The clear implication is that to be with Jesus is to be in Paradise. Therefore, Paradise is not just a place, it is a state of being with Jesus, close beside Him forever. It is the essence of what the

44 It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour,

45 because the sun was obscured; and the veil of the temple was torn in two.

46 And Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, "Father, INTO YOUR HANDS I COMMIT MY SPIRIT." Having said this, He breathed His last.

apostle Paul refers to as being "in Christ" (Eph. 1:3) and "with Christ" (Eph. 2:5).

The second observation on verse 43 has to do with interpretation. Seventh-day Adventists, because of their doctrine of "soul sleep" (i.e., after death the soul of the believer does not immediately go to heaven, but "sleeps" until Christ's return), place a comma after "today" instead of "you," therefore rendering the verse, "I say to you today, you shall be with Me in Paradise." Not only is this incredulous phrasing, but it is inconsistent with the rest of New Testament teaching regarding eternal life after death. Their phrasing is an excellent example of what is called "eisogesis"; that is, interpreting a verse according to one's theology, rather than forming theology by properly interpreting Scripture through "exegesis." Simply put, it is making the Scripture fit the theology rather than the other way around, as it should be in the literal-historical method of exegetical hermeneutics.

O! The evangelistic messages that can be preached on these few verses! By including Jesus' entire encounter with the criminals while on the cross, Luke is, in effect, evangelizing. His point: anyone, at any time, can turn to Jesus for salvation. No matter the sin, no matter the guilt, no matter the punishment deserved, anyone can find eternal life through Jesus. Even while suffering on the cross, Jesus forgave the man of his sins and granted him the promise of eternal life. Whereas the first criminal died without hope, the repentant criminal died full of hope, and at this very moment in time—over 2,000 years later—still abides "with Christ" in Paradise, and will remain "in Christ" for all eternity.

23:44-46 "It was now about the sixth hour...." This would have been about noon. The "sun was obscured" is misleading, as it could be taken as cloud cover or haze. The darkness described in the gospels that took place for three hours (between noon and three p.m.) can only be taken as a supernatural darkness. It could not have been an solar eclipse, for the moon was full at Passover. Nor was it simply a cloud cover, lest the writers would have stated such. The wording in the Greek is best translated "the sun's light failing" and should be taken that way—there was less light coming from the sun, as a flashlight grows dim as the batteries weaken. Why would anyone want to seek a naturalistic explanation for the supernatural event of the Son of God dying on the cross? Perhaps only the Western mind has trouble with supernatural phenomena.

Luke also includes what Matthew and Mark relate, that the veil in the temple "was torn in two." Matthew and Mark include the observation that the veil, which hung between the Holy Place and the

Holy of Holies, was torn “from top to bottom.” Matthew includes the fact that there was an earthquake at the time Jesus gave up His spirit, and this, indeed, could have been the cause of the veil tearing. However, in the case of an earthquake, it would have been more likely that the veil would have simply fallen to the ground as its moorings came out of the wall, and here is why. According to the Rabbinical literature, the veil was sixty feet long from top to bottom, and a “handbreadth” in thickness. This veil, or curtain, must have been extremely heavy and almost impossible to tear by simply pulling it apart. It would not have torn “in two” in the middle. The better explanation is that this, too, was a supernatural event, and the tearing of the veil “from top to bottom” (Matt. 27:51) is actually the hand of God.

The tearing of the veil in the temple is extremely significant theologically, and is a picture of a number of things. First, the tearing of the veil implies that Jesus has entered in as the high priest to atone for the sins of the people (see Heb. 6:19, 9:3, 10:20 for this relationship). Second, the tearing of the veil represents the completion and fulfillment of the old covenant, which is to be replaced, not by the blood of goats and sheep, but by the blood of Christ. Third, the Holy of Holies is therefore open to all who are in Christ Jesus through faith in Him. Fourth, the tearing of the veil represents the end of the law as a covenant between God and man. The new covenant between God and man is based on grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Fifth, along with the fourth, it signifies that those who are in Christ Jesus are no longer under the law, but under grace. And lastly, it signifies that a right relationship with God and with others is not measured according to the Ten Commandments, but to the new commandments of “love one another” and “love your neighbor as yourself” (Rom. 13:8-10).

(Matthew also includes that as Jesus gave up His spirit, “The tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the tombs after His resurrection entered the holy city and appeared to many” [Matt. 27:52-53].)

Verse 46 are Jesus’ last words. He is quoting from Psalm 31:5: “Into Your hand I commit my spirit; You have ransomed me, O Lord, God of truth.” These words should, of course, be the final words of every dying saint. Whereas the prayer of *living* saints should be, “Not my will, but Yours be done,” the prayer of every *dying* saint should be, “Into Your hands I commit my spirit.” If nothing else, this should pretty much sum up one’s entire prayer life.

It is significant, too, that Jesus gave up His spirit on the “ninth hour.” This would have been three in the afternoon, and was the same hour that final

preparations were being made for the Sabbath, the day of rest. The clear picture here is that when Jesus utters the words, "It is finished," the old covenant is finished as well, and all those who are in Christ can enter into His rest: "For we who have believed enter that rest..." (Heb. 4:3).

The apostle John mentions that, because the Sabbath was approaching, and it was against Jewish law for crucified Jews to be left hanging on a cross, they entreated the soldiers to break the legs of Jesus and the criminals (John 19:31-33). The purpose of breaking the legs (specifically, the shin bones, or tibias) was to make it impossible for the victims to raise themselves up to breathe. As noted previously, crucifixion was agonizing because the victim felt as if he were suffocating. When the body was hanging down on the arms, the shoulder and chest muscles would go into painful spasm, making it difficult to inhale. Therefore, the victim would push up on the legs to take the weight of the body off the chest so as to take a breath of air. Thus, an agonizing up and down motion, as the pain in the feet and thighs would become too unbearable, and the body would sink back down. The purpose of breaking the legs, therefore, was to expedite death.

The legs of the two criminals were broken, and it is assumed that they quickly expired. However, Jesus had already died. Thus John records the soldier thrusting a spear into His side to ensure Jesus had indeed died. John makes the comment that "blood and water came out," and "He who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you also may believe" (John 19:35). Why does John make this observation? One must remember that John's gospel was written a number of years after the church was well formed, and actually may have been written when John was living in Ephesus. At that time the cult of Gnosticism was just beginning, and one element of Gnosticism taught that Jesus could not have actually been flesh and blood, that He was a spirit only, because Gnostics considered all flesh as being evil in nature. Therefore, Jesus must have only been a spirit, a phantom as it were. Thus this statement to counter the teachings of early Gnosticism.

The fact that Jesus' legs were not broken is a fulfillment of Exodus 12:46, a command concerning preparations of the Passover meal, that no bones of the lamb should be broken.

23:47-49 Whereas the previous verses focused on Jesus, these few verses focus on Jesus' executioners and the crowd who witnessed Jesus' death. It is interesting that each gospel writer has a slightly different take on the response, as anyone would in trying to describe a crowd's reaction to a horrific

47 Now when the centurion saw what had happened, he *began* praising God, saying, "Certainly this man was innocent."

48 And all the crowds who came together for this spectacle, when they observed what had happened, *began* to return, beating their breasts.

49 And all His acquaintances and the women who accompanied Him from Galilee were standing at a distance, seeing these things.

event. John was an eyewitness; Matthew and Mark may or may not have been around. Luke got all his information from others, particularly Mary, the mother of Jesus, as well as Mary Magdalene (and of course, other eyewitnesses). All the details of Jesus' crucifixion and death would probably take an entire book in itself, and as the apostle John writes at the end of his gospel, "And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that would be written" (John 21:25). No doubt this was doubly true of the crucifixion.

Luke includes the reaction of "the centurion," most likely the one in charge of the crucifixion. Luke states that the centurion "began praising God." To what extent this centurion was praising God is unknown. Both Matthew and Mark state that the centurion, when observing all the events surrounding the crucifixion (darkness, earthquake), stated "Truly this man was the Son of God" (Mark 15:39). One must be careful here, and not assume that the centurion became a believer. The original text does not say "*the* Son of God"; there is no definite article before the word "Son." Thus, the correct rendering should be "This man was *a* son of God," or "This man was *a* son of *a* god." (Note: This is a translator's error in interpretation, *not* a problem with the original text.) And, perhaps this is why Luke made the observation, "...he began praising God"; that is, by declaring Jesus as someone out of the ordinary, and by declaring Jesus innocent and undeserving of His punishment.

Luke is also the only one who mentions that the crowd "began...beating their breasts." The beating of breasts was literally pounding on one's chest with their own fists as a sign of anguish and grief. What Luke is implying here is unknown, but it goes hand in hand with the response of the centurion, that, after Jesus was crucified and treated so terribly and unjustly, everyone began to realize how unjust it was and that crucifying Him was a tragic mistake and miscarriage of justice.

23:50-56a There are two figures that emerge as silent heroes: Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea. John alone identifies Nicodemus, and writes extensively of his encounter with Jesus in chapter 3 of his gospel (see also John 7:50 and 19:39). Joseph, on the other hand, is mentioned in all four gospels. John calls Joseph a "secret" disciple, and Luke states in **verse 51** that he had not gone along with the Council's plan to kill Jesus. (It is assumed that Nicodemus didn't as well.) Whereas most of Jesus' visible disciples were poor, or had little, Joseph and Nicodemus were both well off. Joseph even had a

50 And a man named Joseph, who was a member of the Council, a good and righteous man

51 (he had not consented to their plan and action), *a man* from Arimathea, a city of the Jews, who was waiting for the kingdom of God;

52 this man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.

53 And he took it down and wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid Him in a tomb cut into the rock, where no one had ever lain.

54 It was the preparation day, and the Sabbath was about to begin.

55 Now the women who had come with Him out of Galilee followed, and saw the tomb and how His body was laid.

56 Then they returned and prepared spices and perfumes.

plot of land where a family tomb had been carved out. (In those days, entire families were placed in one tomb.) That Jesus would be placed in the tomb of a wealthy man fulfills Isaiah's prophecy in 53:9: "Yet He was with a rich man in His death." While Joseph is pleading with Pilate for permission to take Jesus' body down before sunset, Nicodemus is purchasing one hundred pounds of embalming material consisting of "a mixture of myrrh and aloes" (John 19:39). Most probably, Nicodemus and Joseph, together with their servants, wrapped Jesus' body in a "linen cloth" and placed Him in the tomb. Unfortunately, there was little time for proper preparation of the body. Likewise, the women who had been following, "saw the tomb and how His body was laid" (v. 55). Luke then notes that they returned to their homes and began preparing "spices and perfumes" to complete preparation of the body, which was to take place on the day after Sabbath (Sunday, our time).

There are a couple of important observations that need to be made about the place of burial. First, Joseph knew *exactly* where it was. After all, he had purchased the site. Had Mary or the disciples gone to the wrong burial place on the day of resurrection, surely he would have said something. Nicodemus and the "women" were witnesses of the place itself, noting its exact location. It would be doubtful that the women went to the wrong location on the first day of the week, as some skeptics have suggested. Not only that, but someone must have directed the Roman soldiers to the correct location. That person was probably Joseph. Thus there are a number of witnesses to the exact location of Jesus' burial site.

Second, there is no question that Jesus is dead, and there is no question on anyone's part that their hopes for a new kingdom have been utterly shattered. Luke notes in verse 51 that Joseph "was waiting for the kingdom of God." Everyone now believes that the entire adventure has come to a horrific halt: Jesus failed, He died, and that's the end of it. Note, too, that no disciple is around when it comes time to bury Jesus: only the women were there for Him at the time of His burial.

There is a final point that needs to be made in regard to Joseph and Nicodemus. Though the gospel writers have nothing bad to say about them, and though they were probably a part of the early church (see Acts 15:5 indicating some Pharisees were converted), there is no indication that Jesus ever appeared to them after the resurrection. You would think that Jesus would have included them when He met with the disciples and "opened their minds to understand the Scriptures" (Luke 24:45). Wouldn't you want the experts of the Scripture in on that?

And on the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment.

The writer believes there is a reason Jesus never revealed Himself to Joseph and Nicodemus in His resurrected body: they didn't deserve it. It goes back to John's statement that Joseph was a "secret" disciple of Jesus. The reason John gives for Joseph and Nicodemus being "secret" disciples was "for fear of the Jews." In other words, they bowed to peer pressure. (To be more accurate, John only writes that about Joseph, but he makes it very clear that Nicodemus came to Jesus "by night" [John 3:2].) The truth is, there can be no such thing as a "secret disciple" of Jesus in a free and open country. In America, where one will not be immediately executed for following Jesus, and where there is freedom of religion, no Christian should be a "secret" disciple of Jesus out of fear of intimidation by peers, employers, or government officials. Due to a liberal-leaning government and a conspiring press, the days are fast approaching, if not already here, when Christians are portrayed as the source of all social problems. Pro-lifers are already seen as trouble-makers, and those who do not agree with the gay agenda and same-sex marriage are vilified as backwards, ignorant, out of touch, and "haters" and "homophobics." These battles are currently taking place in privately owned businesses, and it will be just a matter of time before churches are threatened to lose their tax-exempt status if they do not adhere to government mandates concerning the hiring of gays and willingness to perform same-sex marriage. The question is "How will the church respond?" And, "Will Christians become 'secret' disciples in the workplace for fear of losing their jobs?" This writer is convinced that these issues are no different than taking the mark of the beast. The question, then, is, "Who wants to witness the resurrected Christ?"

23:56b One can imagine that this Sabbath day was probably the worst day Jesus' followers ever experienced. There would have been great mourning, great discouragement, great disillusionment, and great fear. If only they had remembered Jesus' words regarding the Son of Man: "...the third day He will rise again" (Luke 18:33).

Questions for Your Personal or Group Reflection

1. Describe the major events that take place in this chapter. How many times does Pontius Pilate find “no guilt” in Jesus? What is the relationship between Pilate’s declarations, Jonah’s experience in the belly of the fish, and in the number of statements Jesus makes on the cross, as recorded by Luke? How many times did Peter deny Jesus? How many Persons are there in the Trinity?
2. Of the statements by Jesus on the cross (as recorded by Luke), which one stands out the most to you? Why do you believe it is important? How do you plan on applying that statement in your relationship with others?
3. Why do you think Jesus never responded to Herod’s questions in verses 8-11? Do you see a relationship between this encounter and God’s unwillingness to answer prayers? (You might want to refer to James 4:3.)
4. Take a few moments to compare Jesus with Barabbas and the criminals on the cross. Address the issue of getting what you deserve, not getting what you deserve, and getting what you don’t deserve. Take time to comment on this statement: “Justice is getting what you deserve; mercy is not getting what you deserve; grace is getting what you don’t deserve.”
5. Reflect on the elements of crucifixion. Try to imagine how much suffering there was. Now read through the chapter again and find all the ways that Jesus suffered. For whom did He suffer? Can you find love in the crucifixion? What do you suppose could have been God the Father’s just response to mankind when He observed His only Begotten Son suffering so on the cross? What would have been a just reaction of God to all mankind? Why did not God the Father exact judgment on mankind at that very moment? What does that tell you about God’s patience with you, and how you ought to have patience and mercy on others? How do you plan on applying that principle to your daily relationships?
6. How do you plan to implement God’s love in your everyday relationships: in the home, in the workplace, with your fellow church members, with your neighbors, and with those you tend to avoid?
7. How do you plan to “take up your cross daily” and follow Jesus? Give 3 specifics.

The Discipler's Commentary
Fill-in Outline for the Disciple
Luke 23

23:1-5 – The Council (Sanhedrin) brings Jesus before _____

23:6-7 – Pilate learns that Jesus is a Galilean and transfers Him to _____

23:8-12 – Herod becomes frustrated with Jesus, sending Him back to Pilate: Jesus is _____

23:13-17 – The second time Jesus is before Pilate, and Pilate finds in Him _____

23:18-25 – The third time Pilate finds “no guilt” in Jesus, but because of the crowd, _____

23:26-32 – Jesus is sentenced to death on the cross and gives a final _____

23:33-38 – Jesus is crucified and a placard is attached to His cross: _____

23:39-43 – Jesus' interaction with the two _____

23:44-49 – Jesus' final words on the cross, the most applicable being, _____

23:50-56 – Jesus is buried by Joseph of Arimathea before _____

The Discipler's Commentary

Answer Outline for the Discipler

Luke 23

23:1-5 – The Council (Sanhedrin) brings Jesus before Pontius Pilate

- *If necessary, remind the disciple who Pontius Pilate was and how he was appointed to his position by Caesar.*
- *Inform the disciple why the Council wanted to (had to) bring Jesus before Pontius Pilate in order to fulfill their plan for Jesus.*
- *Ensure that the disciple understands how Pontius Pilate responded to Jesus. Emphasize the fact that Pilate found “no guilt” in Jesus. What was the significance (and irony) of Jesus affirming Pilate’s question, “Are You the king of the Jews?”*

23:6-7 – Pilate learns that Jesus is a Galilean and transfers Him to Herod

- *If necessary, remind the disciple who Herod was, especially the fact that Herod, called king of the Jews, was not actually Jewish, but an Edomite.*
- *Remind the disciple that this was the same Herod who had John the Baptist beheaded, and who Jesus referred to as a “fox.”*

23:8-12 – Herod becomes frustrated with Jesus, sending Him back to Pilate: Jesus is silent

- *Ask the disciple why Herod was “glad” to finally meet Jesus. What was Herod’s motives, and what was Herod expecting from Jesus? Ask the disciple why Jesus never answered Herod’s questions. Have the disciple observe the accusations by the chief priests and scribes, and what kind of reaction they were displaying.*
- *How did Herod’s soldiers treat Jesus, and what was Jesus’ response to being treated badly? What is the lesson here for all followers of Jesus Christ?*

23:13-17 – The second time Jesus is before Pilate, and Pilate finds in Him “no guilt”

- *Have the disciple reread verse 13. Besides the chief priests, who else is now included in those wanting to put Jesus to death and release Barabbas?*
- *How many times has it been now that Pilate has found “no guilt” in Jesus? By Pilate’s statement in verse 15, what was the obvious request the scribes and chief priests were making of him?*
- *Ask the disciple what Pilate was referring to when he stated, “I will punish Him,” and what was Pilate’s intent on first punishing Jesus and then releasing Him? What was the apparent tradition behind Pilate releasing a prisoner at Passover?*

23:18-25 – The third time Pilate finds “no guilt” in Jesus, but because of the crowd, he acquiesces (gives in)

- *Have the disciple read verse 18. Then ask the disciple, “What was the crowd’s response that Pilate intended to release Jesus?” Who cried out “Away with this man, and release for us Barabbas”?*
- *The disciple will then need to learn who Barabbas was and why the chief priests, scribes, rulers and “people” were willing to trade Jesus for Barabbas. Of the Jews, who is left out? What is the irony and the significance of the fact that all of Israel is represented here?*
- *In verse 22, have the disciple identify the third time that Pilate declares he can find “no guilt” in Jesus. How does finding “no guilt” in Jesus relate to (1) the three days and nights in the tomb, (2) Peter’s three denials, (3) the three temptations of Jesus in the wilderness, and (4) Luke’s record of the three sayings of Jesus on the cross?*
- *Ask the disciple if he or she can identify Pilate’s fatal flaw in regard to pleasing the crowd. Whose voice, Pilate’s or the mob’s, began to “prevail”?*
- *See if the disciple can relate Pilate’s response to the mob to politicians and to some church leaders today.*

23:26-32 – Jesus is sentenced to death on the cross and gives a final prophecy about Jerusalem

- Here, the discipler may want to inform the disciple about Simon of Cyrene, where he was from, why he was in Jerusalem, and his history following the crucifixion and resurrection; that is, his role in the early church as recorded in Acts.
- Certainly the discipler will want to explain verses 27 through 31, which are not recorded by the other gospel writers. The discipler may want to point out the number of times Luke refers to woman in his gospel.
- If necessary, the discipler may want to explain the other types of “crosses,” and that no one is exactly certain on which type of cross Jesus was crucified.

23:33-38 – Jesus is crucified and a placard is attached to His cross: “King of the Jews”

- The discipler will want the disciple to face the suffering involved in crucifixion. Words like “the Skull” will need to be explained, and therefore why Christians put so much emphasis on the word “Calvary” (which may need to be separated in the disciple’s mind from “cavalry”).
- The discipler must ensure that he or she does not underemphasize the suffering endured by Jesus on the cross, and why Christians are therefore allowed to suffer, called to sacrifice, and able to find joy in their suffering in the name of Jesus. If necessary, provide details as to the mechanics of suffering during crucifixion, and why it was called “slow death.”
- Even more importantly, ensure that the disciple identifies Jesus’ suffering on the cross with Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53.
- Have the disciple reread verse 34 and then explain its significance. How does Jesus’ words here related to what the disciple previously learned in Luke 11:4, and reiterated by the apostle Paul in Ephesians 4:32?
- Have the disciple state the significance (and the irony) of the sign that was hung on Jesus’ cross.

23:39-43 – Jesus’ interaction with the two criminals

- This section about Jesus’ time on the cross is a good place to provide contrast concerning people’s (even Christian’s) response to Jesus. Ensure that the disciple sees the difference between what Jesus can do for someone in this early existence, as opposed to what Jesus can do for someone in a “kingdom” existence. In other words, one criminal wanted Jesus to save him back to an earthly life, but the other wanted Jesus to save him to eternal life. Which is better? Which one does the disciple believe found eternal life?

23:44-49 – Jesus’ final words on the cross, the most applicable being, “forgive them...”

- The “sixth” and “ninth” hours may need to be explained.
- Ensure that the disciple does not assume that the sky became cloudy, or that there was a solar eclipse. This was a supernatural darkness.
- The significance of the temple veil being torn in two (from top to bottom) will need to be explained. Ensure that the disciple relates this event to the end of the Old Testament law and the new covenant, and that the entrance to the Holy of Holies is now accessible to those who are “in Christ.” If time, read from the relevant passages in Hebrews. The discipler may want to read from the commentary the six important features of this event.

23:50-56 – Jesus is buried by Joseph of Arimathea before the Sabbath

- Explain to the disciple who Joseph of Arimathea was, and his position on the Council.
- Explain why the women were not able to prepare Jesus’ body for burial, and what was involved in the process.
- Relate Jesus’ burial with Isaiah 53:9.
- Ask the disciple how he or she would answer the skeptic who claims, “Well, on the morning of the so-called resurrection, the women just went to the wrong location.”
- Ask the disciple if he or she believes Jesus was really dead. How would they know this? What evidence in Luke’s account ensures that Jesus actually died on the cross? (cf. John 19:34).
- Ask the disciple if he or she can determine how Jesus’ followers must have been feeling after Jesus’ death. What were His followers’ expectations of how Jesus’ ministry would end? How were Jesus’ disciples feeling on the next day, the Sabbath?