

THE BOOK OF MATTHEW

Lesson 94, Chapter 27 Continued

Verses 11 through 26 in Matthew chapter 27 have been perhaps the chief source for persistent anti-Semitism within our faith; and this has been so for as much as 1800 years. The question these verses have been alleged to deal with is: who is responsible for Christ's death? By a large margin institutional Christianity says the answer is the Jews as a people, and thus God has transferred all the blessings of the covenants He has made with them to the gentile Church, while leaving the Jews with all the curses. Yet that by no means was a question that Matthew intended to raise or to answer.

In this section we find 3 identifiable persons or groups of persons involved in the decision to execute Jesus of Nazareth: the Jewish religious leadership of both the Temple and the Synagogue authorities, the Roman Prefect over the Roman province of Judea (Pontius Pilate), and the Jewish crowds that stood before him on that fateful Passover day. All agreed to send Yeshua to the cross. The crowds (as typical of mobs) were rather easy to manipulate because certain recognized leaders knew how to prey on their already explosive emotions, which rose high and spread like volcanic ash during all the pilgrimage feasts. So, what caused the mob to turn against Jesus? Verse 20 says:

^{CJB} **Matthew 27:20** *But the head cohanim persuaded the crowd to ask for Bar-Abba's release and to have Yeshua executed on the stake.*

Once again we find that the leadership are the culprits. Even so, the crowds cannot be absolved from their participation. They are given the choice of having the notorious and known murderer Bar-Abba freed as a Passover gift from Pilate, or they could choose to have the innocent Christ released. They chose Bar-Abba

(Barabbas in most Bibles), and even vowed before God to accept any penalty that might come from their choice. But even more that this penalty from God, should there be cause for it (a curse, in Jewish thought), it would extend to their children. Clearly this was not a serious or well thought out expression of the sureness of their choice or of a consequence they were actually willing to bear, but rather one brought on by a reckless frenzy fomented by the Jewish religious leadership.

Matthew's point was to make a historic recollection of how Jesus's formal condemnation occurred and the execution proceeded, as opposed to trying to point a finger of blame for it. In fact, so far it's the Jewish religious leadership that Yeshua has indicted for the spiritual state of the naïve and misinformed common people, since it is the leadership that is tasked with properly instructing them in God's laws and commands. And yet the misinformed cannot claim innocence when, finally, they are shown God's truth but they prefer to stick what the falsehoods they have previously known. Bottom line: a mob cannot be representative of an entire population, race, or people group. Nor can the general population be held responsible for the decisions of a corrupt and perverse leadership that cause violence to happen. Especially in a 1st century political environment when leaders were not chosen or elected by the people, but rather leadership offices were handed down within families or bought and paid for or acquired through subterfuge, can the common people be held accountable. Therefore, placing blame for Christ's death on the Jews or the Roman gentiles is a red herring, and is certainly not the point Matthew was making. Therefore, it is not something that we, today, ought to be distracted with as we study the Passion Narrative.

Let's read a little more of Matthew chapter 27.

RE-READ MATTHEW CHAPTER 27:26 – 44

I've mentioned in earlier lessons that all the Gospel accounts about Yeshua's death use only a couple of pages or so to speak of it. Matthew, especially, is quite brief and concise in telling us what transpired. The trial and death of Yeshua, even the aftermath, is almost anti-climactic for these Gospel writers and it is something we need to ponder deeply. While it is a Church mantra that about all that matters for a Christian is Christ's death and resurrection, then why does the New Testament spend so little time on it? I'd like to think that the 90+ lessons in Matthew that we've so far studied together answer that question: who

He was historically, what He represents, and what He taught us is equally important as His death and resurrection. If we were to go by the volume of inspired writings on the matter, the former is even more important than the latter. Do not mistake what I'm suggesting. I'm in no way meaning that His death and resurrection are not the defining moment in which Salvation from our sins became a possibility for us. Rather it is that it is not an either/or situation. We cannot on the one hand claim Salvation based on our faith in His death and arising from the grave, if we (on the other hand) determine to largely ignore living out that Salvation in the way He tells us we are obligated to do. Or as Yeshua's biological brother James put it:

CJB James 2:19-26 ¹⁹ You believe that "God is one"? Good for you! The demons believe it too- the thought makes them shudder with fear! ²⁰ But, foolish fellow, do you want to be shown that such "faith" apart from actions is barren? ²¹ Wasn't Avraham avinu declared righteous because of actions when he offered up his son Yitz'chak on the altar? ²² You see that his faith worked with his actions; by the actions the faith was made complete; ²³ and the passage of the Tanakh was fulfilled which says, "Avraham had faith in God, and it was credited to his account as righteousness." He was even called God's friend. ²⁴ You see that a person is declared righteous because of actions and not because of faith alone. ²⁵ Likewise, wasn't Rachav the prostitute also declared righteous because of actions when she welcomed the messengers and sent them out by another route? ²⁶ Indeed, just as the body without a spirit is dead, so too faith without actions is dead.

James uses a wonderful metaphor to help us understand the importance of following through with the actions that Christ told us to do; that of the relationship between body and spirit. When he says "spirit" he is referring to the invisible life force that makes us living beings. So, if faith in Christ's death and resurrection represents the body, then doing what He taught us to do represents the spirit. If we don't do what He taught us, then the body is dead because there is no spirit (no life force) to make our faith alive. James does not put one above the other; both are important and required in equal measure.

Verse 27 initiates the sequence of moving Christ to the cross. The governor's soldiers (meaning Roman soldiers) took over. Jews were no longer part of the process. Although we can't come up with a number, there were more than a few soldiers surrounding Yeshua no doubt because His impending death was so controversial and it was the Feast of Passover when messianic fervor was at a

fever pitch in Jerusalem. They began by removing His standard peasant-Jew garb, and putting a scarlet robe on Him. Where was Jesus at this moment? It was likely at one of two places: either the Antonia Fortress located on Temple grounds, or it was the former Herod's palace in the upper city where Pilate stayed when he was in Jerusalem. Pilate's actual home was located in Caesarea Maritima located on the Mediterranean Sea, north of Jerusalem, and that's where he resided most of the time. He only came to Jerusalem at the times of the feasts in order to make sure there weren't riots, or when some kind of official business was necessary there.

Matthew's Gospel says a scarlet robe was put onto Jesus, but Mark says it was purple; Mark was not correct. Purple was a color used mostly by royalty. Where would the Romans have obtained a purple robe? Scarlet was the color of a Centurion's robe or cape. No doubt the Centurion in charge of the cohort lent his scarlet cape to be put onto Jesus as a mock royal robe in order to make fun of Him. To further humiliate Him they took some kind of a vine that had thorns on it and wove it into a mock crown. When we see the sort of diadem worn by Roman Emperors then we realize that this was what the soldiers were imitating since Jewish kings wore crowns of gold. They also handed Him some type of reed to imitate a king's scepter. Whatever these items were, they were at immediate hand; there is no feasible way that these rough soldiers planned this humiliation in advance or took the time to seek out these various items to place on Yeshua. To complete the comedy, they knelt down before Christ and said: "Hail to the King of the Jews".

When we back away from the scene, and when we see what happens once He's nailed to the cross, we understand that as far as the soldiers know, and as far as Pilate was concerned, Yeshua's crime was His claim as being a king. In the Roman Empire this was the highest form of treason; only Caesar could be a king. Thus, while the Jewish Sanhedrin convicted Him of blasphemy, they knew better than to take that charge to Pilate. Rather they told Pilate that Christ claimed to be a king, knowing that this was the surest way to get Pilate to agree to condemn Him because this made Jesus a threat to Roman sovereignty. As we've discussed on numerous occasions: from an earthly standpoint, and from a purely historical standpoint, Jesus died as a political prisoner for political reasons.

What is so interesting, and ironic is that in truth Jesus **was** the King of the Jews. And He stated as much when He claimed the role of Messiah, which was understood by the Jewish people since ages past to be a new Davidic king. The

Roman soldiers spat on Yeshua. Spitting upon Him was then, just as it remains today, one of the worst acts of contempt. Culturally it was an infliction of great shame to be spat upon. Thus, as He continues His journey to the cross, He is now in a societal state of shame so far as Jewish society was concerned. The soldiers took the reed or stick from His hand and lashed Him with it. When they had finished their physical and psychological abuse, they removed the cloak from Him and gave it back to the Roman Centurion that lent it.

Backing up a little bit, verse 26 had told us that He was whipped. What this means is flogged. Flogging was a truly terrible experience, and something that was regularly done to prisoners that were going to be crucified because it was bound to hurry along the dying process. Flogging involved hitting a person, over and over again, with a device called a flagellum that had multiple leather arms, and at the end of these arms were bits of metal or sharpened bone that would tear into the flesh and rip it. Profuse bleeding along with intense pain was the result. It was not unusual for a man to die during flogging. Obviously Jesus survived it, but what comes next tells us that He was greatly weakened by it.

Verse 32 tells the story of a Jewish man from Cyrene named Shim'on that was forcibly enlisted to carry Christ's cross. The picture of this event is one of the most popular painted by Christian artists. However, the idea that Yeshua truly carried his own cross is not tenable. The Roman execution stake was huge and no single man could have carried it. Rather what was carried was the cross beam. This beam, called a patibulum, was usually tied to the condemned prisoner's arms and he more or less carried it on his shoulders to the site of his impending crucifixion. Part of the reason for this procedure was to further publicly disgrace him, but also to be a very visible warning to any Jew that would think to oppose Rome. Further it would exhaust the prisoner and as he hung on the cross it would reduce his ability to push up with his legs to lessen the agony of not being able to breathe well. Again, in a cruel way, it might hasten the death process.

In any case some random Jewish person from among the onlookers was grabbed by the Roman soldiers and made to carry the cross beam as Yeshua was simply unable to after being flogged and beaten. Cyrene was a city that lay on the coast of what today we call Libya. It already had as early as the 4th century BC a substantial Jewish population, no doubt as a result of Israel's exiles. Shim'on was but one of many scores of thousands of Jewish pilgrims in town for the Feasts of Passover, Unleavened Bread, and Firstfruits. Mark's

Gospel further identifies this particular Shim'on (a very popular and widely used Jewish name) as the father of Alexander and Rufus, and indeed Shim'on was just arrived to Jerusalem when he saw this disturbance happening (talk about bad timing!). Such a reference might indicate that while Shim'on lived in Cyrene, Alexander and Rufus were locals.

The place where the crucifixion would take place is called **Gulgolta**; it's an Aramaic word that means "skull" or in our passage it would be fair to call it "the place of the skull". The Latin Vulgate Bible translated this to **calvaria**, from which we get the English word calvary. So, does the term **Gulgolta** as indicating "skull" mean that the place where it happened somehow looked like a skull? Or was it kind of a macabre name for a non-descript place where hundreds, probably thousands, of crucifixions happened? I really won't venture a guess, since there is no way to know for sure and one guess is as good as the other. Where, exactly, this place was located in Jerusalem is another issue. To be clear, however: there is a difference between where He was crucified and where He was entombed. Gordon's Calvary is currently the most popular guess as to where He was crucified. There is a rock formation there that does have some resemblance of a skull. Whether it looked like that 2,000 years ago is another matter. A couple of hundred yards away is what today is known as the Garden Tomb; this is the place some think Jesus was buried. Another candidate for His burial place is where the Church of the Holy Sepulcher is built. I truly don't have any better opinion on the matter than do the many scholars who have chimed in on it over the centuries. What I do know is that the Church of the Holy Sepulcher as we see it today wasn't built until the Crusader era. Prior to that there was a building there that was an edifice dedicated to Emperor Constantine, which had been built over an edifice built to Emperor Hadrian. Such is the way religious sites have worked over the centuries. In Christ's era, this place lay outside the walls of Jerusalem. Since neither a place of execution nor a place of burial would have been allowed inside the city walls, then the place of the Holy Sepulcher can't be ruled out. On the other hand, it seems a most unlikely place for a tomb, but it's not out of the question.

Therefore, the place called the Garden Tomb (to which I've taken many tour guests), is the more likely location of His burial. And it is adjacent to the place that has a cliff that looks like a skull. The irony is that today both of these sites lay outside the Damascus Gate, meaning they are in a Muslim area. In fact, a bus station used mostly by Muslims was built many years ago immediately below the cliff that looks a bit like a skull. Wherever the execution took place it must have

been very public. There had to have been roads and paths that went by it for easy access and because the Romans wanted it to be highly visible to as many people as possible. And finally, it had to be well outside the walls of Jerusalem because as a place of death it was ritually unclean, and the Romans would have honored that in order to keep the peace. Beyond that we'll likely never know exactly where Christ was crucified or buried.

Matthew's Gospel says that BEFORE He was nailed to the stake, He was offered a mixture of wine with something called gall. Gall is more a description of something bitter or not very good tasting than it is the name of a particular substance. Mark says the actual substance in the wine was Myrrh. Myrrh was a narcotic when ingested. So, wine (probably with a high alcohol content) mixed with Myrrh was intended as an act of mercy to dull the pain. This, too, was rather standard Roman practice. Recall that crucifixion was reserved strictly for Jews. It was not a form of execution used on gentiles (at least not in the Holy Land). Yeshua refused to drink it. Why? Good question. Some of the evangelical branches of the Church say it was because it was wine that contained alcohol; these are the same branches that don't believe the "wine" mentioned in the New Testament or that Christ used at the Lord's Supper was actual wine but rather merely grape juice (which, if one knows much of anything about Jewish 1st century society and of Torah ritual practices, it is that low alcohol content wine drinking was normal and customary). None of the Gospel writers explain Yeshua's refusal of the pain killer, and so we won't attempt it either. But they do agree that this is what happened.

After He refused the narcotic pain killer, Yeshua was nailed to the Roman **stauros**... the Roman style execution stake that Christians call a cross. A victim being nailed to the stake was actually the usual practice. There is a mistaken belief among many Christians that Jesus's crucifixion was unique partially because they used nails through His wrists and feet (to make it extra gruesome) instead of tying his hands and feet to the stake using ropes. A heel bone with a spike through it and dated to that time period has actually been found to prove the point. The Gospel writers all speak of Christ being nailed to the cross matter of fact-ly and simply move on; in other words, nothing unusual to see here. As the nailing was going on, some of the soldiers took Yeshua's garments and played a dice game for them. None of them could have seriously wanted this peasant Jew's garments; they had no value. But, it was apparently a kind of Roman custom among soldiers. The mention of it is likely to highlight the fulfillment of yet another messianic prophecy.

^{CJB} **Psalms 22:17-19** ¹⁷ *Dogs are all around me, a pack of villains closes in on me like a lion [at] my hands and feet.** ¹⁸ *I can count every one of my bones, while they gaze at me and gloat.* ¹⁹ *They divide my garments among themselves; for my clothing they throw dice.*

Next, the Roman soldiers handling the executions that day sat down to wait as the ones hanging on the execution stakes slowly expired.

Verse 37 makes plain what we talked about a little earlier. A sign was placed above Yeshua's head telling what the charge against Him was. It said "This is Yeshua, King of the Jews". It was usual that a sign would be created and hung around the neck of the condemned stating what offense had been committed. Yet, assuming all our Gospel writers got it correct, the sign was placed above the head of Christ and it was less a list of charges and more a continued ridicule and mocking. In other words, it was meant for the Jews who passed by to see and take heed to forget this Messiah figure some hoped would lead a rebellion against Rome and then become the first Jewish king in many centuries. The message: this is what will happen to any Messiah that happens to show up. Submit to Rome; you have no hope.

Since a sign was placed above Jesus's head, then there had to be at least a bit of the vertical post that rose up higher than the horizontal cross beam. So even though most historical illustrations of a Roman death stake have it in the shape of a capital "T", apparently there was a few inches of the post above it. Either way, the shape of the cross as we know it today was in no way like it was in that era. In fact, the earliest use of a cross as a Christian symbol was in the 300's A.D., based on the Greek letter Tau. Later Constantine promoted this kind of cross as the official Christian symbol. Obviously the cross is nothing that early Jewish Believers could ever possibly have accepted because it was symbolic of the most barbaric form of execution used on them. And while accepted by most branches of Christianity, the exact shape of the cross varies significantly across these branches. The Bible never pushes forward the idea of a wooden cross as a God-given symbol of Christianity, or even as something to remember Christ by. The cross is a Christian tradition and ancient custom; it is not a biblical command or even a recommended biblical icon. The cross is, and has been, far too much used as a symbol of gentile Church superiority, or in some cases as downright bigotry against Jews. It is far past time to rethink some of the symbols that while having become entrenched as holy in Christian institutions, are in the end only tradition-based icons. When the use of the cross causes great hurt to our Jewish

brothers and sisters in the faith (and for good reason), and thus creates a strong wall of separation, we have to carefully think through the value of using it. Let me be clear: I am not anti-cross. I understand that most well-meaning Christians aren't intending it as an insult to Jews. But, when we know that it is offensive for what it means for them, and when our most basic biblical command is to love our fellow man as we love ourselves, then we have to ask if the insistence upon using certain symbols doesn't do more harm than good in promoting faith in Yeshua. After all, Yeshua was the **Jewish** Messiah. Enough said.

Verse 38 says that 2 robbers or thieves were placed upon their own crosses next to Yeshua; one on either side of Him. The Greek word for the two criminals is **lestes**. It carries the general meaning of a thief, but somehow that really doesn't fit with the scenario. Rome did not execute common thieves. So, whatever these men did extended well beyond mere thievery. Some language scholars think the term is broad enough to include the kind of robbers that attack and even kill people to steal from them (what we'd call armed robbery today). So, we must not think of a couple of poverty-stricken Jews who stole bread or a fish to feed themselves or their families. These were men who had committed serious offenses that very likely involved harming people. Perhaps they were thought to be Jewish rebels.

The charge of some of the Jewish onlookers of saying that Jesus was going to destroy the Temple and build it back in 3 days mostly results from a misunderstanding of what He had earlier said and meant. He meant it prophetically and in a couple of different senses. He knew that a few years later the Temple would be destroyed. The building itself had become so sacred to the Jewish people, and the historical memory of it having been destroyed by the Babylonians so hateful for them, that the thought of Jesus implying that He was going to destroy the Temple (something He did NOT say) brought on instant anger. We've already heard about people swearing (making vows) using the Temple itself as the guaranteeing 3rd party, almost as if it was alive. The only real value to the Temple had always been as the place of God's presence on earth, at the moments He chose to be there. Otherwise, it stood empty except of furniture. Since the Babylonian exile, and the rebuilding of the Temple, not even the Ark of the Covenant was present any longer. The building itself was viewed as a holy place, even as today the foundation walls for a Temple in Jerusalem that hasn't existed for nearly 20 centuries (the Western Wall, the Kotel) is considered holy by the religious Jews.

Of the many passers' by of this highly visible place of crucifixions, some hurled insults at Yeshua, and some shook their heads at Him and mocked Him as did the Roman soldiers. This, too, is prophetic fulfillment.

^{CJB} **Psalm 22:7-8** ⁷ *But I am a worm, not a man, scorned by everyone, despised by the people.* ⁸ *All who see me jeer at me; they sneer and shake their heads:*

It is interesting that in Mark's Gospel the insults hurled at Yeshua are called blaspheming (which clearly is not meant by Mark in its most technical function). And yet, while in the **P'shat** sense (the literal and simplest sense) these are but offensive slurs aimed at Christ, in the **Remez** sense (the deeper hint sense) these passer's by actually *are* committing blasphemy in its fullest biblical function because they are saying these foul and slanderous things to the divine! In truth this understanding of blaspheming Jesus can only be discovered with the benefit of hindsight, and yet He regularly showed His fellow Jews His divine side through the incomparable miracles He facilitated and because He outright said He was divine by identifying Himself (countless times) as the Son of Man. The people were just blinded to it by their centuries of manmade Tradition that had obscured the truth.

Among the many scorning words thrown at Yeshua included "If you are the Son of God then come down from the cross". Such wicked words can't help us from remembering something similar said to Him much earlier in Matthew.

^{CJB} **Matthew 4:3-6** ³ *The Tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, order these stones to become bread."* ⁴ *But he answered, "The Tanakh says, 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of ADONAI'"* ⁵ *Then the Adversary took him to the holy city and set him on the highest point of the Temple.* ⁶ *"If you are the Son of God," he said, "jump! For the Tanakh says, 'He will order his angels to be responsible for you.... They will support you with their hands, so that you will not hurt your feet on the stones.'"*

The connection is unmistakable. These jeerers are acting as Satan's agents towards Jesus, even using the same word formula! Earlier Satan tempted Yeshua when He was hungry, then tempted Him to prove Himself by jumping off a high place. Now these people are telling Jesus to climb down off the cross, if He really is who He says He is. All these temptations have to do with Christ

gaining something for Himself; whether it is bread to satisfy His hunger, or performing a high dive to obtain a kingdom Satan says he'll give to Him. Now it is to come down from the cross to ease His personal suffering and to avert death. When these same jeerers tell Christ to save Himself they don't mean it in the sense of salvation as we think of it. Rather it is in the sense of saving Himself from agony and death; they know nothing about any claim of spiritual deliverance through Him.

Next we're told that Jewish religious figures mocked Him. I suspect at least some of these were members of the Sanhedrin that had pronounced the death sentence on Him and they wanted to come and view this dark spectacle to satisfy themselves that their will was being carried out by Rome. Like the other jeerers they say something like "He can save others but not Himself". And say if He is who He claims to be then come down from the cross. I wonder, might any of us in that era based on what seemed to be the available information at the time have understood the idea of "saving" in the sense of personal salvation from our sins? Even Christ's 12 disciples didn't seem to get it. So, while we can study our New Testaments, and benefit from the many fine teachings given to us by excellent teachers and Pastors, and understand from a distance of time what these words and events meant in the larger spiritual if not cosmic realm, it simply was not so obvious to the Jews of that day.

These Jewish leaders (no doubt playing to others around them) say that the proof they demand of Yeshua being the Son of God is for Him to come down from the death stake. In other words, they are asking for another sign. His response to the demand of a sign the first time it was thrust upon Him was never more appropriate than at this moment.

^{CJB} Matthew 12:38-40 ³⁸ At this some of the Torah-teachers said, "Rabbi, we want to see a miraculous sign from you." ³⁹ He replied, "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign? No! None will be given to it but the sign of the prophet Yonah. ⁴⁰ For just as Yonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea-monster, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the depths of the earth.

The sign of Jonah, being entombed for 3 days and 3 nights, was the only sign necessary.

Even more prophetic words from Psalm 22 are fulfilled at the vile utterances of

the Jewish religious leaders when they say that since Jesus claims to trust God so much, then let God rescue Him from this crucifixion.

CJB Psalm 22:9 *"He committed himself to ADONAI, so let him rescue him! Let him set him free if he takes such delight in him!"*

Even the criminals who are dying on their crosses on either side of Yeshua join in the insults. It makes me think of people who have resisted Christ all their lives, are moments from death, and when offered the opportunity to know Him and be forgiven and saved still refuse it almost as a stubborn badge of honor. Whatever saving is to be done, they'll do themselves or not at all.

Let's read a few more verses.

RE-READ MATTHEW CHAPTER 27:45 – 50

Matthew records that from about noon to 3 in the afternoon that day as Messiah hung on the death stake, all the Land was covered in darkness. This must be referring to the famous prophecy of Amos.

CJB Amos 8:8-10 ⁸ *Won't the land tremble for this, and everyone mourn, who lives in the land? It will all rise, just like the Nile, be in turmoil and subside, like the Nile in Egypt. ⁹ "When that time comes," says Adonai ELOHIM, "I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight. ¹⁰ I will turn your festivals into mourning and all your songs into wailing; I will make you all put sackcloth around your waists and shave your heads bald in grief. I will make it like mourning for an only son and its end like a bitter day.*

What is so dazzling about this prophecy is not only the mention of the sun going down at noon and darkening the whole Land, but that God will turn the festivals into a time of mourning. What is Israel joyously celebrating at the moment of Christ's execution? The 3 Springtime festivals. The reality of recognizing prophetic fulfillment is that it is often missed because it is not taken literally enough. Some of the prophetic predictions are so difficult to fathom, or seem so impossible in and of themselves to happen, that we look for another meaning. Then they happen just as it was stated and God's people miss it. That's what was happening with the Jewish people of the 1st century. Let's not let that happen among ourselves as the End Times approaches along with the many

prophetic fulfillments that accompany it.

Was this 3-hour darkness actual tangible darkness? Did the sun become obscured? Or is this meant symbolically? What “Land” is this speaking about? Jerusalem? Judea? All of the Holy Land? The entire Earth? Darkness is a biblical term for evil or for God’s impending wrath. Could the sky have also darkened with some unusual weather event? A sky so dark that it unnerved people? The evil that was occurring, which borders on an evil that might be the worst in human history to that point (crucifying Jesus, the Son of God), could be what the Gospel writers intended. Or perhaps it was the portent of the wrath of God that was going to (in a matter of minutes) be poured out in a most unsuspected and devastating way. The term “the Land” is just as problematic because biblically it ranges in scope from the city of Jerusalem at its narrowest to the Holy Land in general at its widest.

It was at the final moments of this darkness when Yeshua released His spirit and died. But not before His Father poured out His wrath upon His Son. And that will be the opening topic of our discussion, next week.