

# WHY FOUR GOSPELS? THE FOUR-FOLD PORTRAIT OF CHRIST

in  
Matthew, Mark, Luke and John

by

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## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

### THE SUFFERING, DEATH, AND BURIAL OF THE KING

Matthew 26:1-27:66

In the beginning of these studies we called attention to the fact that all four of the evangelists tell in much detail the story of the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ.

We would remind ourselves again of this all-important truth; for the cross and the resurrection of our Lord are central and fundamental to all the Gospel message. And now as we read the story according to Matthew, we want to compare it with the record of the other three evangelists.

No two tell it in exactly the same way, for each writer had a different purpose in view; yet there are no contradictions. The Holy Spirit guided all four of the human authors; and their four narratives, when taken together, complete the most sacred history in all the Word of God — how Christ, “**who knew no sin,**” was “**made sin for us,**” “**that we might be made the righteousness of God in him**” (II Corinthians 5:21).

While the four evangelists do not always tell the same details; yet all four do tell us that our Lord was crucified on the Jewish Passover. That fact surely must have borne weight with the Hebrews; for they knew the meaning of the shedding of the blood of the paschal lamb. Christ Jesus was the “**Lamb of God . . . without blemish and without spot,**” sacrificed for the sins of the world.

As the blood applied to the lintel and door posts in Egypt meant the safety of the firstborn from death, even so the blood of Christ applied to the sinner’s heart by the Holy Spirit means safety from all condemnation and guilt of sin.

While all four of the evangelists quote Old Testament prophecies which were fulfilled in the suffering and death of Christ, Matthew quotes more and refers to more than do the other three.

This is in keeping with the main purpose of the book, to prove that Jesus of Nazareth was Israel's promised Messiah and King, foretold in their own Old Testament Scriptures. Our souls will be blessed if we take a good reference Bible, read the twenty-sixth and twenty-seventh chapters of Matthew, and look up each Old Testament quotation concerning our Lord's suffering and death. This will reveal to us how faithfully the Holy Spirit has set forth Christ's right to His Messianic claim; for only the all-wise God could have written these minute details concerning His death, many centuries before He was born in the world.

For our lesson today, we have outlined some of the most prominent of these fulfilled prophecies:

#### Old Testament Prophecy

##### 1. *Sold for thirty pieces of silver:*

**"So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver,"** Zechariah 11:12.

Mark and Luke simply say that the Lord was betrayed for "money"; John does not mention the money.

##### 2. *Betrayed by His "own familiar friend":*

**"Yea, mine own familiar friend in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me,"** Psalm 41:9.

John 13:18 is an even clearer quotation of this prophecy.

##### 3. *"This is my blood of the new covenant":*

**"I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah,"**

Jeremiah 31:31.

##### 4. *The Shepherd smitten; the sheep scattered:*

**"Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts: smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered,"** Zechariah 13:7.

Mark 14:27 also quotes this prophecy.

##### 5. *Alone in His sorrow:*

**"I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none,"** Psalm 69:20.

##### 6. *"Brought as a lamb to the slaughter":*

**"He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth . . .,"** Isaiah 53:7.

#### Quotation in Matthew

**"And they covenanted with him (Judas) for thirty pieces of silver,"** Matthew 26:15.

**"He that dippeth his hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me,"** Matthew 26:23.

**"This is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins,"** Matthew 26:28.

**"All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad,"** Matthew 26:31.

**"And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour?"** Matthew 26:40-46.

**"Then all the disciples forsook him, and fled,"** Matthew 26:56.

**"Jesus held his peace,"** Matthew, 26:63; 27:12.

7. *The risen Lord exalted and coming again in glory:*

**“The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool,”** Psalm 110:1.

**“The Lord shall be king over all the earth,”** Zechariah 14:9.

Mark 14:62 and Luke 22:69 also quote this prophecy.

8. *Shamefully Treated:*

**“I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting,”** Isaiah 50:6.

**“They shall smite the judge of Israel with a rod upon the cheek,”** Micah 5:1.

The other evangelists also record these indignities heaped upon the Lord.

9. *The thirty pieces of silver cast to the potter:*

**“And I took the thirty pieces of silver, and cast them to the potter in the house of the Lord,”** Zechariah 11:12, 13; cf. Jeremiah 18:1-4; 19:1-3.

Only Matthew records this incident. Compare Acts 1:16-20.

10. *Imprisoned:*

**“He was taken from prison and from judgment,”** Isaiah 53:8.

This “hall,” called in Mark the “Praetorium,” was “the court which is the judgment hall.”

The other evangelists record this fact.

11. Further indignities:

**“Thou hast known my reproach, and my shame, and my dishonour: mine adversaries are all before thee,”** Psalm 69:19.

12. *Vinegar . . . mingled with gall.”*

**“They gave me also gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink,”** Psalm 69:21.

The other three evangelists tell of this also.

13. *Crucified:*

Psalm 22:1-21 is a graphic prophecy of the

**“Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven,”** Matthew 26:64.

**“Then they did spit in his face, and buffeted him; and others smote him with the palms of their hands,”** Matthew 26:67; 27:30.

**“And when he (Pilate) had scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified,”** Matthew 27:26.

**“Then Judas . . . brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders . . . and they took counsel, and bought with them the potter’s field, to bury strangers in,”** Matthew 27:3-10.

**“Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall, and gathered unto him the whole band of soldiers,”** Matthew 27:27.

**“And they stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe . . . a crown of thorns . . . and a reed in his right hand . . . and mocked him,”** Matthew 27:28-30; cf. the other evangelists.

**“They gave him vinegar to drink mingled with gall: and when he had tasted thereof, he would not drink,”** Matthew 27:34, 48.

**“And they crucified him,”** Matthew 27:35 and

crucifixion of Christ. We quote just one statement here: **“They pierced my hands and my feet,”** verse 16.

*14. The casting of lots for His garments:*

**“They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture,”** Psalm 22: 18.

*15. A spectacle to godless men:*

**“They gaped upon me with their mouths . . . they look and stare upon me,”** Psalm 22:13, 17.

*16. Crucified between two thieves:*

**“He was numbered with the transgressors,”** Isaiah 53:12.

*17. The taunting mob:*

**“All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him,”** Psalm 22:6-8, 15, 17.

*18. The forsaken cry:*

**“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”** Psalm 22:1.

Our Lord’s forsaken cry on the cross gives us just a glimpse of His real agony, in that for the first time in all eternity He had to be forsaken by His holy Father when He Himself, the holy Son of God, “became sin for us.”

*19. “Buried with the rich”:*

**“He made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth,”** Isaiah 53:9.

The other evangelists tell us that Joseph buried the Lord, but only Matthew tells us that he was “rich,” quoting Isaiah 53:9.

the other Gospels.

This prophecy from the Psalm is wonderful, in that it was written by David centuries before the Romans instituted crucifixion. The Jews put people to death by stoning, as in the case of Stephen.

**“They . . . parted his garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots,”** Matthew 27: 35; Mark 15:24; Luke 23: 34; John 19: 23, 24.

**“And sitting down they watched him there,”** Matthew 27:36.

**“Then were there two thieves crucified with him, one on the right hand, and another on the left,”** Matthew 27:38; Mark 15:27, 28; Luke 23: 33; John 19.18.

**“And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, and saying . . . If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross,”** Matthew 27:39-44; Mark 15:29-32; Luke 23:35-37.

**“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”** Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34.

**“When the even was come, there came a rich man of Arimathea, named Joseph . . . and begged the body of Jesus . . . and laid it in his own new tomb,”** Matthew 27:57-60.

As we look back over the minute prophecies concerning Christ's first coming into the world, literally fulfilled in His birth, life, suffering, death, and burial; as we shall yet consider further the prophecies fulfilled in His resurrection, His ascension into heaven, His exaltation at the right hand of the Father; as we think of all the many hundreds of prophecies yet to be fulfilled in His second coming in power and great glory — as we think of the miracle of all this, we can only thank Him for such assurance of His deity and power and wisdom and love.

Such things could be written only of God Himself, written centuries before they came to pass, that we might know that **“Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.”**

And surely any honest Hebrew, having read Matthew's record with an open mind and heart, could only acknowledge Jesus, the Lord, as King of the Jews.

We have only touched the fringes of the crucifixion story. We would not forget the significance of the inscription above the cross, **“THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS”** (Matthew 27:37), mentioned also by the other three evangelists;

- The supernatural darkness at noon-day, recorded by the first three Gospel writers,
- God's silent testimony to the deity of Christ;
- The awful crime of humanity in nailing His body to the accursed tree;
- The rent veil, spoken of by Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and symbolic of **“the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth”** (Romans 10:4);
- The Roman centurion's testimony of faith in the Christ whom he saw crucified, also mentioned by Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

The Jews especially should have known the significance of the rent veil; for it was a supernatural act of God which rent the veil of the temple **“in twain from the top to the bottom”** (Matthew 27:51).

Every Hebrew knew that, from the days of Moses, the veil had closed the way into the Holy of Holies. Only the high priest could enter there, where God dwelt in the Shekinah Glory, above the mercy seat which hid from view the broken commandments. And even the high priest could thus enter the presence of God only once a year, on the Day of Atonement, not without blood. When Christ died, He forever opened the way into heaven itself, of which the Holy of Holies was a type.

By His own shed blood, Christ changed God's judgment throne into a mercy seat, a throne of grace, for the repentant sinner. That is why He bids us go directly to Him in prayer, with boldness, without fear.

He is our Great High Priest. His sacrifice on Calvary atoned for our guilt. And He ever lives at the right hand of the Father to make intercession for us. That is the meaning of the rent veil!

And then, there are several other important facts, recorded by Matthew only, in connection with the suffering and death and burial of Christ; we can mention them here just briefly:

### *1. The Creator of Angels.*

It was when Peter cut off the ear of the high priest's servant that the Lord told him to put up his sword, adding the significant words about His power to call to His side "**twelve legions of angels**" (Matthew 26:53, 54).

Now the Jews had a reverent attitude toward the holy angels, through whom God had often spoken to their fathers. But here was the Creator of angels declaring His power to call 72,000 angels to His side; for one legion in the Roman army was composed of 6,000 soldiers. We are told in Hebrews 12:22 that there is in heaven "**an innumerable company of angels**"; and in Revelation 5:11 that they number "**ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands.**"

All of this "**innumerable company**" of God's servants were at His command; but if the Lord had called upon them to save Him from the cross, "**how then**" should "**the scriptures**" have been fulfilled? (Matthew 26:54). We should have no Saviour! It was His love for sinners that sent Him to the cross!

### *2. "Two False Witnesses"*

Matthew 26:60.

Mark, Luke and John tell of false accusations made by false witnesses against the Lord; but only Matthew mentions the fact that "**at the last came two false witnesses**" (Matthew 26:60). This was understood by every Jew to meet the requirement of the Law of Moses, demanding "**two or three witnesses**" to establish a fact in court. Thus we have in this brief reference one of the many Jewish characteristics of the book.

### *3. "His Blood Be on Us"*

Matthew 27:25.

Only Matthew records the startling statement of the Jewish people, who said to Pilate,

**"His blood be on us, and on our children."**

Little did the Jews of that day realize the tragedy involved in those awful words! The blood of their rejected Messiah and King has literally been upon their children for almost two thousand years. They have suffered as no other nation has suffered — persecuted, robbed, pillaged, tormented, massacred — all because they crucified their Lord and King.

They asked for "**His blood**"; and only the grace of God has preserved them through their great afflictions. Only by the grace of God will their once-rejected Messiah and King bring them unto Himself when He returns in glory

It is especially significant that Matthew should record their own words, which laid the responsibility for their wicked deed at their own door.

*4. The Earthquake and the Resurrection of “Many Saints” at the Death of Christ*  
Matthew 27:51-54.

Only Matthew tells of two more supernatural events at the time of our Lord’s death — the rending of the rocks, and the resurrection of “**many**” Old Testament “**saints**.”

It seems as though he were adding proof upon proof, to convince his Jewish people that Jesus was, indeed, very God. Now a “**saint**” is a believer in the Lord Jesus. Just who or how many of these Old Testament “**saints**” arose, and “**went into the holy city**” of Jerusalem, “**and appeared unto many**,” we do not know. But certainly they were one more proof of the supernatural work accomplished by the Lord on the cross.

*5. The Roman Guard at the Lord’s Tomb*  
Matthew 27:62-65; cf. 28:11-15.

Only Matthew tells the story of the Roman soldiers stationed at the Lord’s tomb to keep His disciples from stealing His body away, as the Pharisees feared they would do. This is important. By their very act, they made it humanly impossible for the disciples to steal the Lord’s body; and, therefore, were defeated at their own game, as it were.

True enough, when Christ did arise, they bribed the soldiers with “**large money**” to tell the world that they went to sleep at their posts; and that, while they slept, the disciples stole the Lord’s body. But those Jews knew, and the Roman soldiers knew, and every intelligent person living in that day knew that no Roman soldier would dare go to sleep at his post of duty. To do so would have meant forfeiting life itself; so stern was the Roman law! And that is why the Jews assured the bribed soldiers, saying,

“**If this come to the governor’s ears, we will persuade him, and secure you**” (Matthew 28:14).

It was all a hoax, framed by satanic men who knew not God and were used by Satan himself to deceive many in Israel. And Matthew, inspired by the Holy Spirit, tells the whole story to add to the weighty evidence of the bodily resurrection of Christ.

*The Seven Sayings of Christ from the Cross.*

In any study of the cross of our Lord it is difficult to hurry over this very heart of the Gospel. But we are seeking, in these lessons, not to study the text too analytically, but to get a bird’s-eye-view of the four Gospels, to see why there are four and only four.

In our consideration of Mark, Luke and John, we shall find many blessed truths concerning Christ’s suffering, death, and burial, not mentioned in Matthew; but for our purpose just here let us close this section of our study with an outline view of our Lord’s seven sayings from Calvary’s Cross.

Matthew and Mark record only the forsaken cry. Luke tells of three sayings mentioned by none of the others; and John tells of three not given by any of the other evangelists. The Holy Spirit had a purpose in everything He recorded and in everything He omitted, whether we grasp all the truth He had in mind or not.

We list them here in what seems to be their chronological order, together with the references:

1. **“Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do,”** Luke 23:34.
2. **“Today shalt thou be with me in paradise,”** Luke 23:43.
3. **“Woman, behold thy son! . . . Behold thy mother!”** John 19:26, 27.
4. **“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”** Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34.
5. **“I thirst,”** John 19:28.
6. **“It is finished,”** John 19:30.
7. **“Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit,”** Luke 23:46.

It is beautiful to know that, even in His death, our Lord’s first thoughts were for others; for His first three utterances from the cross were for those He came to redeem.

It seems fitting that Luke, who emphasized the sinless humanity of our Lord, should be the evangelist to tell us of His prayer for His enemies and His promise of salvation to the repentant thief. What an example in forgiveness! Both the thieves had railed on Him; then one asked for salvation; and the forgiving Lord answered his petition. Christ’s prayer for those who crucified Him must have had a large part in converting the Roman centurion, who bore witness to the fact that Jesus was, indeed, the Son of God.

It seems fitting also that John, the beloved disciple, should be the one to record his Lord’s having given His mother into his keeping. Indeed, so far as we know, John was the only one of the twelve who went all the way to the cross. Early in His trial **“the disciples forsook him, and fled”**; while Peter followed **“afar off,”** then denied his Lord.

Matthew, we have seen, wrote of the forsaken cry, knowing without doubt that the believing Jews would find in it the fulfillment of their Old Testament prophecy of Psalm 22:1. Both Matthew and Mark, in quoting this heart-searching cry of the Lord, must have realized that it gave us possibly the clearest insight into the real agony of the cross to be found in all the Word of God. That the sinless God-Man should become our Sin-Bearer — that is the meaning of Calvary. And it breaks the hardened sinner’s heart. In our human frailty and sin, we cannot enter fully into the depths of its meaning; but we can thank Him for such fathomless love!

The words, **“I thirst,”** remind us of the excruciating pain of crucifixion, also foretold in Psalm 22:15, in the prophecy, **“My tongue cleaveth to my jaws.”**

It seems especially in keeping with the purpose of his Gospel record that John should be the one chosen by the Holy Spirit to give us our Lord’s triumphant words, **“It is finished.”** Over and over again John had been quoting the Lord’s often repeated statement that He came to do the Father’s will, the work which the Father had given Him to do.

And now that work of redeeming lost sinners was accomplished. That is why He triumphantly declared, “**It is finished.**” Nothing could be added to His redeeming work, fully accomplished when He died to atone for the sins of the world.

And it seems appropriate that Luke, presenting the Lord Jesus particularly as the Son of Man, should record His prayer of trust in His Heavenly Father, committing His Spirit into the Father’s hands. It was as a Man that He prayed; and as a Man He died, knowing that His Father would raise Him bodily from the dead, following three days and three nights when His Spirit would be in paradise.

It was a prayer of trust; and it was more — it was the deliberate laying down of His life, even as He said in John 10:17, 18. No man could take His life from Him; but when His hour came to die vicariously, He voluntarily yielded up His Spirit to the Father, His body going into the grave to await His resurrection on the third day.

~ end of chapter 13 ~

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