

The Book of Matthew Study Guide

Matthew 27-28

27:1-10

In the previous chapter Yeshua was forced into a trial by the Sanhedrin that was illegal in nature. This chapter begins with those religious authorities rendering their decision and the consensus was to have Him killed. But the Sanhedrin no longer had the authority to carry out capital punishment. That right was taken away in the year 6 A.D. when Rome downgraded the status of Judea from a kingdom to a Roman province and dethroned Archelaus as the last ruler of Judea, replacing him with a Roman procurator/governor. Josephus tells us:

“Now Archelaus’s part of Judea was reduced into a province, and Coponius, one of the equestrian order among the Romans, was sent as a procurator, having the power of [life and] death put into his hands by Caesar” (Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, Book II 8:1).

The Talmud confirms this occurrence:

“It is taught that more than forty years before the destruction of the Temple, capital punishment was removed from Israel” (Jerusalem Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 18a, 24b).

The Sanhedrin could still enforce minor violations of Mosaic law, but the true standard of power, the ability to administer capital punishment was taken away and limited to Roman authorities alone. So the religious leaders manipulated the system by getting Rome to do the dirty work. And they took Yeshua before Pontius Pilate, the fifth man to serve as procurator/governor.

Meanwhile, Judas has second thoughts about his betrayal. The purchase of the potter’s field with the 30 pieces of silver is a fulfillment of Zech 11:13. Here Matthew refers to Jeremiah, not Zechariah, which some have used as “evidence” of biblical error. But there is a simple explanation. The scroll of all of the prophets was originally organized by the size of the various books, and Jeremiah was the largest one in terms of words, so it came first. Thus the entire collection of the writings of the prophets could be identified by the name of Jeremiah, the first book, just as the five books of the Torah in Hebrew are identified by the first word of each book (*Bereshit, Shemot, Vayikra, Bemidbar and Devarim*).

27:11-26

The trial of Yeshua before Pilate is incomplete judicially. Pilate asks Yeshua if He is King of the Jews in order to assess whether He is a political threat. But Yeshua’s agreement is insufficient to cause concern. So the only evidence submitted are the charges made by the Sanhedrin, which in their own trial morphed from speaking against the temple to blasphemy, which were not violations of Roman law, but suddenly became unsubstantiated charges of sedition against Rome when they got to Pilate. None of this impressed Pilate, and his indifference was supported by his wife’s advice to leave Yeshua alone because of a dream she had (v. 19). So Pilate finds no fault in Yeshua (accurately).

But instead of releasing Him, Pilate takes the political route. He gives the crowd an opportunity to determine Yeshua’s fate, following a Roman custom that allowed the release of one prisoner at Passover. He then performs a ceremonial act of washing his hands, symbolizing having no personal responsibility for Yeshua’s death. But in reality, he ends up sharing in the culpability

because he failed to save a man that he knew to be innocent.

The religious leaders incite the crowd to call for the release of Barabbas instead of Yeshua. Pilate then accepts their petition for the crucifixion of Yeshua. The plea of the crowd is reinforced by their acceptance of guilt for his death. Their proclamation in v. 25, “His blood be on us and on our children” has been used as a justification of persecution of the Jewish people ever since that day. Haters of Jews claim that the crowd brought a curse upon the Jewish people of every generation. That way of thinking is faulty for several reasons:

- A crowd (mob) cannot speak in an official capacity for a nation or people group.
- The guilt of sin is limited to the one who commits it and is not transferred generationally. The 18th chapter of Ezekiel deals with these kind of issues:

“Yet you say, ‘Why should the son not bear the punishment for the father’s iniquity?’ When the son has practiced justice and righteousness and has observed all My statutes and done them, he shall surely live. The person who sins will die. The son will not bear the punishment for the father’s iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment for the son’s iniquity; the righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself.” (Ezek 18:19-20)
- If Jews were the only people responsible for the death of Yeshua, then He died only for the sins of the Jews. That would mean the people claiming to be Christians would not be saved.
- The Bible makes it clear that no particular people group is responsible for His death because all people are sinners and that is who He died for (Acts 4:27-28; Rom 3:23; 5:7-8).

27:27-44

Then the Roman soldiers take over. Not only do they carry out the sentence of death, they engage in insulting behavior on top of it. They could have just pounded the nails and got it over with. Instead, they mock Him as being a king by putting a scarlet robe and a crown of thorns on Him, plus spitting and whipping Him, and dividing up his garments so they could have something new to wear themselves or to sell at a swap meet.

v. 39 – The people passing by hurl abuse at Him verbally.

v. 41 – And so do the religious authorities.

v. 44 – Even the robbers being crucified next to Him manage to get up the energy to insult Yeshua (Lk 23:39-43 tells us that one criminal was the exception).

This speaks poorly about human nature, as all aspects of society engaged in scornful behavior that arises from sin.

In verses 40 and 42 onlookers and religious leaders tell Him to come down from the cross, which Yeshua has the capability of doing since He is divine. Why were these people saying those words? They were being influenced by Satan who knew exactly what was taking place in the spiritual realm, and he did not want the sins of the world to be forgiven. So he was engaging in the influence of temptation that was consistent with his prior attempts to thwart Yeshua’s purpose and plan (Mat 4:1-11; 16:23).

Back in v. 34 Yeshua was offered wine mixed with myrrh, which was used as a painkilling potion for those experiencing crucifixion. Yeshua refused it in order that he could fulfill Isaiah’s prophecy (53:4) that He would bear our griefs and sorrows, which required full awareness of

what was happening.

Notice also that Yeshua was considered to be the same as men who had committed real crimes. This was in fulfillment of Isa 53:12 – that prophesied the suffering Servant being “numbered with the transgressors.” As Isaiah also prophesied, this was all done to bear the sins of people, not any that He had committed Himself.

27:45-56

Darkness descends upon the land from noon until 3:00 p.m. (converting Roman time to our modern way of reckoning time). This occurrence is consistent with the penultimate plague that came upon Egypt during the original Passover, right before the Angel of Death passed through the land.

v. 46 – Yeshua cries out, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?” This is a direct quotation from Ps 22, a passage that describes in great detail the act of crucifixion, including the mocking (7), His bones out of joint (14), being surrounded by evildoers (16), His hands and feet being pierced (16), and casting lots in order to divide His garments (18). Yeshua said those specific words because that was the moment that the judgment of sin was being placed upon Him spiritually. And God cannot look upon sin, as Habakkuk 1:13 says about Him:

“Your eyes are too pure to approve evil, And You can not look on wickedness with favor.”

So for that moment, the intimate relationship between the Father and the Son was interrupted. The Father turned His back figuratively on the Son when He took the sin of the world upon Himself. It is another dimension of the separation that is caused by sin, just as we are eternally separated from God when we do not receive the atonement of Yeshua covering our sins.

v. 50 – And then Yeshua died.

v. 51 – His death was accompanied by a massive earthquake and the tearing of the *parokhet* – the veil that separated the holy place from the holy of holies in the Temple. The Talmud does not state that the veil was torn, which is understandable because it would acknowledge the invalidation of rabbinic Judaism. But the Talmud does acknowledge that 40 years before the destruction of the temple, the Sanhedrin could no longer meet in their normal location known as the Chamber of Hewn Stones, which implies a catastrophic event like an earthquake (Shabbat 15a). It would indeed take a major earthquake to rip the veil in two, since it was 60 ft long and as thick as the palm of a man’s hand. The tearing of the veil represented access to the throne of God for common people. Previously only the Kohen HaGadol—High Priest could pass through the veil on Yom Kippur to make atonement for sins once each year. But now all believers have access to the most holy place in heaven according to Heb 9:3-9; 10:19-22 because Yeshua’s atonement was done “once for all.”

Regarding the timing of Yeshua’s death, Josephus tells us that 3:00 p.m. is when the Passover lambs began being slaughtered in Jerusalem, lasting until 5:00 p.m. (*Wars of the Jews*, Book 6, Ch 9, v. 3). This was no coincidence, for Yeshua was “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (Jn. 1:29).

What about the day of the week? To make that determination, we have to look at the broader context. Originally the sacrifice of the lambs and the observance of the feast both began on Nisan 14 (Ex 12:6; Num 9:3; Lev 23:5). But later in the Pentateuch, a door was opened for a shift in the observance.:

“You are not allowed to sacrifice the Passover in any of your towns which the Lord your

God is giving you; but at the place where the Lord your God chooses to establish His name..." (Deut. 16:5-6).

This is a reference to His permanent place of worship – the Temple in Jerusalem that would be built on Mt. Moriah. And when they had established the Temple, He gave a specific instruction. v. 6 continues – "...you shall sacrifice the Passover in the evening at sunset, at the time that you came out of Egypt." The date when the Israelites left Egypt was on Nisan 15. Based this instruction, when the Temple was built in Jerusalem, the observance of Passover was shifted to Nisan 15, the anniversary of their departure from Egypt. That practice carries forward to our modern day, as Seders begin right after the sunset starting the 15th, not at the end of the 14th. And in the second temple times, that was also the case.

That shift of observance also merged together Passover and Unleavened Bread into a single feast, as is manifested in the way that Seders are conducted today. Moreover, after the shift, the original day of Passover on the 14th became known as the Preparation Day (Matt. 26:17-19), which continues on today as the day when observant Jews purge their homes of leaven. So we have to recognize that there were two ways of observing Passover in biblical times –

1. The original Passover in Egypt on the 14th of Nisan.
2. The permanent Passover at the Temple and thereafter on the 15th of Nisan.

All this to say that in the year when Yeshua died, He kept Passover with His disciples on Nisan 14 according to the Ex. 12, Num. 9 and Lev. 23 instructions, while the Temple authorities and the rest of the people did so after sundown on the 15th according to the instruction of Deut. 16. That means that Yeshua died at 3:00 p.m. on the 14th day of Nisan.

We also know that Yeshua resurrected from the dead on the Feast of First Fruits and according to Mat 28:1 that was on the first day of the week because Yeshua was already risen by sunrise on that day. That would be the 16th day of Nisan.

You can then simply overlay our modern calendar over the Hebrew calendar. And that places the Crucifixion at 3:00 p.m. on Friday and the Resurrection at some point during the night of Saturday or Sunday.

- v. 55 – makes specific mention of the fact that many women who were His followers watched the crucifixion (in Jn 19:26 John is mentioned as the only male disciple who was there). That tells us that women were the ones in that culture who attended to the deceased, but may also speak to the way that men and women tend to be shaped by culture regarding faith and faithfulness.

27:57-66

Normally the Romans left the crucified corpses hanging on their crosses until they rotted away.

vv 57-58 – Joseph of Arimathea, a wealthy disciple of Yeshua, asks Pilate for the body. Luke 23:5-51 tells us that Joseph was a member of the Sanhedrin who voted against Yeshua's punishment. Pilate agrees, perhaps because of his conviction that Yeshua was innocent and thus wrongly killed. He seems to represent the great number of people in our world who have some awareness of Yeshua, including believing that He was a righteous man. But they do not allow Him to be Lord over their lives. Regardless, this act allowed two more prophetic passages to be fulfilled:

"For You will not abandon my soul to Sheol; nor will You allow Your Holy One to undergo decay." (Ps 16:10)

“His grave was assigned with wicked men, Yet He was with a rich man in His death.”
(Isa 53:9)

Meanwhile Pilate continues being the pragmatist and orders that the grave be made secure by allowing the temple authorities to post guards there.

28:1-20

The Sabbath begins and the body of Yeshua rests in the tomb, Which is consistent with the principle of rest associated with Shabbat. Then the Sabbath ends on Saturday evening, and the first day of the week begins. But then it would be dark, and in those days, no one would be out and about in darkness. At some point during the time we now call Saturday night or early Sunday morning, Yeshua rises from the dead and then leaves the tomb in the darkness.

Then another earthquake occurs and an angel comes and rolls away the stone to show that it is empty. This was witnessed by the guards, who were naturally shaken by the experience. Matthew tells us that two women named Mary went to the tomb at sunrise (one is Mary Magdalene and Luke 24:10 identifies the other one as Mary the mother of James). At first all they saw was the empty tomb and an angel who told them what happened.

v. 8 – that gave them great joy. Contrast that with vv. 11-15 that describes how the guards agreed to a lie and a coverup. Both groups – the women and the guards – had the same information, but they responded very differently.

The women did get to see Yeshua face to face. And we learn from Luke and John that the disciples saw Him in Jerusalem. Then Matthew and the other writers record how He appeared to them again when they returned to the Galilee.

v. 19 – Matthew concludes his gospel with Yeshua’s command that is now known as the Great Commission: “to go and make disciples of all nations.”

Overall, the theme of this gospel has been about entering and living the kingdom of heaven. And as such, it required Yeshua to bring a corrective to the burdensome religion that had been established in Israel. v. 20 – gives us the key to bringing that solution about. It is observing all that Yeshua has commanded us, not the tradition of the elders, which later became the oral law. So this gospel is a record of those commandments. It is now simply up to us to do as He has said.