

CHAPTER 11

The Place of the Skull

Finally the Roman soldiers led Jesus away to crucify Him and to put Him to death as a common criminal. He was led to a place outside the city's walls, a place that was called G_____ (Matthew 27:33), which means "a place of a S_____." This place was also called C_____ (Luke 23:33). "Calvary" (the Latin word for "skull") means the same thing as "Golgotha" (the Aramaic word for "skull").

Crucifixion was a terrible form of death. Death by the electric chair or firing squad or guillotine or hanging is relatively fast and painless. The person's physical life comes to an end very quickly. But the sufferings of the cross seemed endless. Victims did not usually die for two or three days. This is why Pilate was so surprised to learn that Jesus was dead after being on the cross for only about six hours (see Mark 15:44). Criminals have been known to survive on a cross for more than a week!

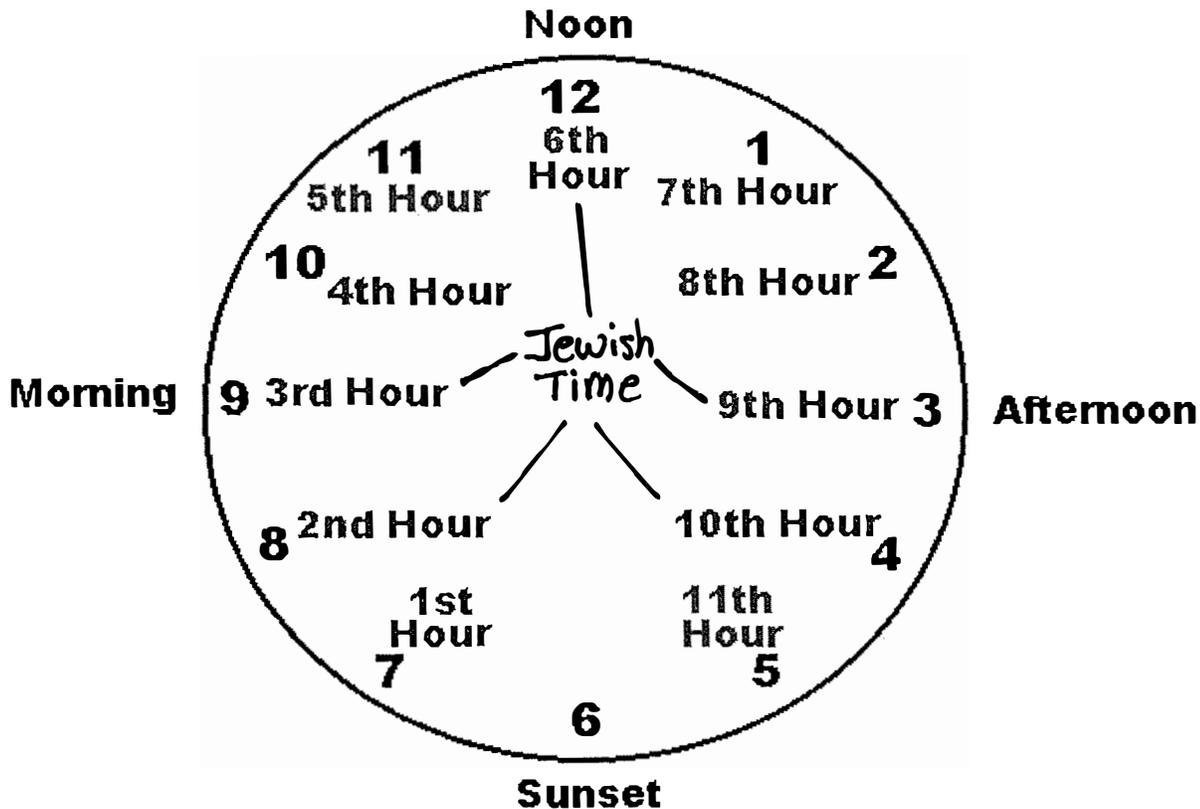
Why was Christ crucified? What crime was He guilty of? What wrong things did He do? What sins could be found in His life? What commandment did He ever break? The Bible says that Christ "did no S_____" (1 Peter 2:22)! He was perfectly righteous and innocent! He did not go to the cross because of His sins. He went to the cross because of *our sins* (see 1 Cor. 15:3)!

Let us each ask *ourselves* these same questions: What crimes am I guilty of? What wrongs have I done? What sins can be found in my life? Which commandments have I broken? ***Christ is the innocent One and I am the guilty one!*** I am the one who deserves **death** (Romans 6:23), not He!

Right before the Roman soldiers nailed Jesus to the cross, they offered Him a drink of W_____ flavored with M_____. (See Mark 15:23; myrrh was a bitter substance which acted like a drug and helped to deaden the pain and lessen the suffering.) Did Jesus take this drink or did He refuse it (Mark 15:23)? _____ Our wonderful Lord wanted to keep His mind clear and He wanted to endure the pain. No one can ever say that Jesus did not fully suffer for those whom He came to save! Also, this ought to make us think twice before we allow ourselves to take harmful drugs or anything else that would keep us from thinking clearly.

According to Mark 15:25, what time was it when they put Jesus on the cross?

_____ The Jews kept time differently than we do today. Our day ends at midnight, and that is also when the new day begins. The Jewish day ended and a new day began at sunset (usually about 6:00 p.m.). The clock in the following illustration helps us to understand the difference between our time and Jewish time. What we call the twelfth hour (12:00 o'clock), the Jews called the sixth hour. Nine o'clock in the morning our time would be the third hour Jewish time. Jesus was put on the cross the third hour, which means 9:00 o'clock in the morning.



What did the Lord say as He was hanging on the cross? (Circle the correct answer.)

- a. Father, judge them and destroy them because of this wicked thing which they have done.
- b. Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.
- c. Father, I'm thankful that some day these evil men will suffer eternal punishment for their awful deeds.

Jesus did not come to _____ men's lives, but to _____ them (Luke 9:56).

Jesus was not the only Person who was crucified on that day. Who else was crucified (Matthew 27:38)? _____ Was the cross of Christ located on the left, the center or the right (Matthew 27:38)? _____

As the Lord suffered on the cross, people passed by and mocked Him and made fun of Him (read Matthew 27:39-43). If Christ had come down from the cross, then how could sinful men be saved? It was love that kept the Lord on the cross! The enemies of the Lord thought that they were finally getting rid of Jesus! They were in for a big surprise (as we shall see in the next chapter)!

At first, did both of the thieves (robbers) also make fun of Jesus or did only one of them mock Him (Matthew 27:44)? _____ Not only were these two criminals guilty of terrible crimes, but they were also guilty of mocking and making fun of the sinless Son of God! But one of these men changed. One of these men allowed God to work in his heart and suddenly his eyes were opened and his mouth was shut!

This amazing account is found in Luke 23:39-43. As we study Luke 23:39 we see that a great change took place. Instead of two criminals making fun of Christ, there was now only one who was hurling insults at the Saviour! There was only one who was asking Christ to save him from crucifixion (but caring nothing for the salvation of his soul). The other man was strangely silent. Finally he broke the silence and spoke out, not against Christ as he did before, but against his robber companion (see Luke 23:40).

What caused such an amazing change? Was this thief impressed by the prayer of Jesus (Luke 23:34)? Did he observe the manner in which Jesus bravely endured the suffering of the cross? Did he notice the way Jesus reacted to the mocking of the people, including himself? Did he believe that Jesus was the "King of the Jews," just as was written on the superscription over the center cross (Luke 23:38)? Can you think of other things he may have noticed or observed about Jesus that may have helped to produce such a change? *Are there things that people can see and observe in the way we live and act and speak that may help them to change their minds about Christ?*

Did this man believe that he was guilty and that he deserved to die (Luke 23:40-41)?

_____ Did he believe that Jesus was guilty and deserved to die (Luke 23:41)?

_____ Before a person can be saved, he must first realize how lost he really is. This man realized that he was guilty and that he deserved death. Have you realized this?

This condemned criminal was soon to pass into eternity. Death was at the door. Time was running out. As he hung on a cross between earth and heaven, he knew it would not be long before he was dead. Was there any hope for this man who had just about reached the end of a sin-filled life?

If salvation depended on something that man must do (as many people believe and teach), then there was absolutely no hope for this guilty robber. Consider the following suggested ways of salvation and explain how hopeless (and how silly!) each of these would have been in the case of this dying criminal:

- 1) To be saved you must live a good life.
- 2) To be saved the good you have done must outweigh the evil you have done.
- 3) To be saved you must keep the Ten Commandments.
- 4) To be saved you must perform good works.
- 5) To be saved you must read your Bible and go to church.
- 6) To be saved you must be baptized.
- 7) To be saved you must become a member of a church or synagogue.

This man could do none of these things, but there was one thing that he could do (read Acts 16:30-31). He could B _____ on the Lord Jesus Christ! And that's the one thing he did!

How does Luke 23:42 show this man's faith? Hint: How can a dead King have a kingdom? Even though this robber knew Jesus was dying, he somehow believed that this same Jesus would come

into His kingdom and would someday rule on the earth!

What wonderful words of comfort did Jesus give to this dying man (Luke 23:43)?

_____ When would this man be with Jesus? _____ How did this man know that this would really be so? *If you were to die today, would you be with the Lord? Are you sure? How do you know this? Did Paul know this (Phil. 1:23; 2 Cor. 5:8)?* _____

In Matthew 27:45 we read of a great miracle that took place during the crucifixion. A strange darkness covered the land for three hours. [See the Clock illustration given earlier in this chapter.] This darkness lasted from the sixth hour (which is _____ o'clock our time) to the ninth hour (which is _____ o'clock our time)! This is usually the brightest time of the day when the sun is the highest! In the Bible, darkness is often a symbol of **the judgment of God**. For example, one of the judgments on the land of Egypt was **darkness** (Exodus 10:21-22). See also Zephaniah 1:15. It was during these three hours on the cross that God Himself was judging His Son and punishing Him for the sins which we have done.

Why was the cross of Christ so terrible? Many men were crucified just as Christ was, and most of these men remained on the cross much longer than Christ did. Also there have been people who were tortured and put to death by means and methods even worse than crucifixion. Other individuals have had to greatly suffer for years as a result of an injury or illness or disease before death finally came. What was so terrible about the death of Christ?

If we think only of the physical sufferings that Christ went through, then we are missing the whole point. When Jesus looked ahead to the cross, what was it that He dreaded the most (Mark 14:36 and John 18:11)? Circle the correct answer:

- a. The nails that would pierce His hands and feet
- b. The spear that would pierce His side
- c. The agony of being suspended on a cross for about six hours
- d. The cup which the Father would give Him to drink

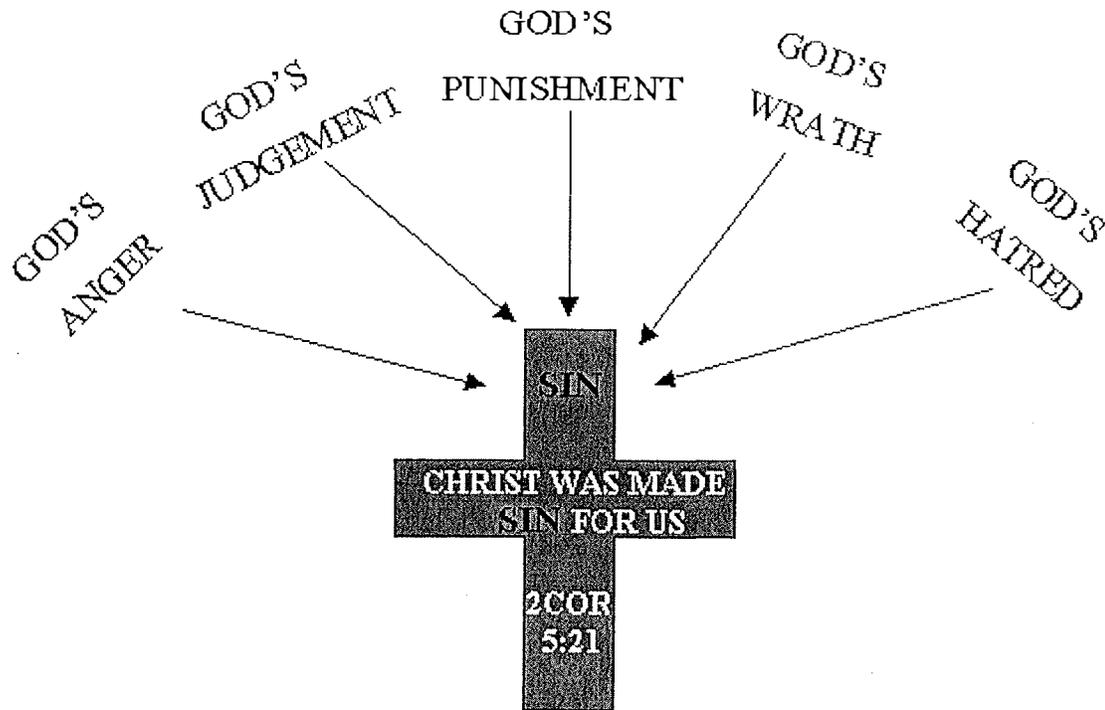
According to Christ's own words in Matthew 27:46, what was the most terrible part of the crucifixion experience? Circle the correct answer:

- a. Being nailed to the cross by the Romans
- b. Being mocked and reviled by the unbelieving Jews
- c. Being tortured by the weight of His own body coming down on the nails
- d. Being forsaken and abandoned by Almighty God

Christ was not overly concerned about what the Roman soldiers would do to Him, but He was greatly concerned about what God the Father would do to Him *because of your sins and mine!* In Isaiah chapter 53 we learn about some of the things that **God** did to the Lord Jesus:

- Isaiah 53:24: God struck Him and afflicted Him.
- Isaiah 53:6: God laid on Him all of our iniquities (sins).
- Isaiah 53:10: God B _____ Him.

Christ was **made sin for us** (2 Cor. 5:21) as illustrated on the next page.



Do you believe that Christ did all of this for you? If so, when was the last time you bowed your head and really thanked Christ for the cross He endured and for the sins which He bore (1 Peter 2:24)?

Just before Jesus died, He cried out with a loud voice. See Matthew 27:50. He said something that He wanted everyone to hear! What was this victory cry that He shouted out (see John 19:30)?

The Lord's victory cry (John 19:30) was this: I ___ I ___ F _____. The work of salvation was done! The penalty for sin was fully paid! After Jesus had shouted out this victory cry, He then spoke His final sentence. What did He say (Luke 23:46)?

The other two men (the two criminals) were still alive. The Roman soldiers did not want the bodies to remain on the cross (John 19:31), so they came and broke the L_____ of these two criminals (John 19:32). This was done to hasten death. Without the legs to give support, the body would sink down and the victim on the cross would quickly suffocate, be unable to breathe, and then he would die. If their bones had not been broken, these two men may have lived another day or two, but the breaking of their legs brought a quick end to their suffering. Remember the criminal who changed his mind and believed on Jesus? As soon as he died, where did he go (Luke 23:43)? _____ Who was with him (Luke 23:43)? _____ As for the other criminal, he went to a place where the suffering was far worse than a Roman cross (compare Luke 16:19-28). Those who reject Christ as their Saviour have nothing good to look forward to after death.

When the soldiers came to the center cross, what did they see (John 19:33)?

Did

they break the legs of Jesus (John 19:33,36)? _____ They knew that Jesus was dead, but just to make sure, what did one of the soldiers do (John 19:34)?

There are some people who do not believe that Jesus really died on the cross. They say that when they took Jesus down from the cross, He was still alive and then He tried to fool everybody by saying that He had risen from the dead. But the blood on the spear proves that Jesus really died!

Christ died; that's history (it's a fact!). Christ died for me, that's salvation!

Thomas, one of the disciples, believed that Jesus was really dead, and he knew that the Lord was pierced with a spear. But he did not believe that the Lord really rose again. In John 20:25 Thomas told the others that he would not believe in the resurrection unless he could thrust his own hand into the place where the spear had gone (see John 20:25). Did Jesus give him a chance to do this (John 20:27-30)? _____ Did Thomas actually do this? _____ For Thomas, seeing the Saviour alive in front of him was enough.

Yes, the Lord Jesus really died! Yes, He really died to save sinners! Yes, He really rose again to give us eternal life and to be our living Saviour and Lord! In the next chapter we will learn more about His wonderful resurrection! ***HALLELUJAH! WHAT A SAVIOUR!***

