

From the Cross to the Tomb

Key Verse:

“He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in His death; though He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth.”

Isaiah 53:9

Level 5 lesson 41

Extra: Find out what you can about Roman law and justice.

Read John 19:31-42; Matthew 27:57-66
Further Mark 15:42-47; Luke 23:50-56

CALLOUS SOLDIERS Our last lesson ended with the Lord commending His spirit to the care of His Father and dying on the cross. This was an amazing act, quite beyond the ability of any human - yet another proof of Christ’s deity; of His being God. Some may ask, “But how do we know He really died?” That fact is recorded for us in an interesting way.

The Jewish leaders, knowing that crucifixion was a very slow death often taking days, asked Pilate for permission to speed up the process, by breaking the legs of the prisoners. This made it impossible for them to breathe, and hastened their death. The Pharisees didn’t want the bodies still hanging on the crosses on the Sabbath day, which in this case was ‘a High Day’ (special Sabbath).

Pilate duly agreed to their request and instructed soldiers to carry out the grim task. They broke the legs of the thieves who had been crucified with Jesus, but when they got to the Lord Jesus it was unnecessary; John 19:33 tells us they found Him already dead! One of the soldiers (perhaps to confirm that Jesus was dead, or simply to ensure it) thrust his spear into Jesus’ side. Immediately, blood and water flowed out of the wound, a sure sign that He was dead.

In all this, the soldiers were unknowingly fulfilling the words of Scripture. Psalm 34:20 predicted hundreds of years before that, “Not a bone of Him shall be broken,” while Zechariah 12:10 prophesied that, “They shall look on Him whom they pierced.”

CAREFUL SERVANTS Normally, criminals who had been crucified were simply removed from the cross and their bodies burnt without any ceremony at all. No doubt Jesus’ enemies would have liked to see the same thing done to His body - but God had other plans! As Peter later explained in Acts 2:22-36 - God promised through the Prophet King David, that He would “not allow the body of His Holy One to see corruption,” - whether by decay or cremation.

So it was that after this final brutal act, our Lord’s body was treated respectfully and given an honourable burial. Two secret disciples, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, [who were actually members of the Council which had condemned Jesus

to death, but who had disagreed with their decision] went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.

Joseph of Arimathea was a good man, quite prominent in Jewish society, who Scripture tells us “was waiting for the Kingdom of God.” Nicodemus too, was highly respected.

Pilate, after ascertaining from his centurion that Jesus was actually dead, [and a Roman centurion certainly knew a dead body from a live one!], gave them permission to take Jesus’ body. This is another argument against those who deny Christ’s resurrection by claiming He never really died – [called the ‘swoon theory.’]

It may seem strange that none of the Apostles had anything to do with the burial, but this is perhaps understandable. Judas of course, had hanged himself and John was looking after Mary the Lord’s mother, as Jesus had asked him to. Peter was hiding in shame and the other nine were probably in deep grief and disillusionment; with the death of Jesus, all their hope seemed lost. In these circumstances, God used these two men to perform the funeral rites. They took Jesus’ battered body down from the cross and embalmed it with valuable spices, myrrh and aloe. Then after wrapping it in linen cloths, they laid it in a new, garden sepulchre [a cave-like tomb, cut out of rock] which belonged to Joseph. After rolling a heavy stone across the opening, both men departed. (Matthew 27:60)

CALCULATED SECURITY However, the Priests and Pharisees were still concerned. They went to Pilate and told him that Jesus had spoken about “rising again in three days.” They didn’t believe He would, but they thought that His disciples might steal the dead body and claim that He had risen from the dead, using the empty tomb as evidence. They feared that instead of being the end of this ‘rebel movement’ as they saw it, even more people would then follow Christ.

So they asked Pilate to prevent such a thing happening. Pilate wanted nothing more to do with the whole affair, but told them, “Take a guard; go and make the tomb as secure as you can.” Matthew informs us that they did this, “sealing the stone, and they placed a guard of soldiers there.” [ch 27:66] Then they left, confident they’d seen the last of Jesus and His followers.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. Write out two Scriptures from the Old Testament relating to the death of the Lord Jesus Christ.

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2. Why didn’t the Apostles assist at the burial?

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3. What part did Nicodemus play?

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4. Why were the Priests and Pharisees alarmed about the burial?

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5. What do you think of their plan to make the sepulchre secure?

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My Name is: _____ Age: _____

The Resurrection

Key Verse:

“But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep.”

1 Corinthians 15:20

Extra: If you had been living at this time, what might have been your reaction?

Level 5 lesson 42

Read: John 20:1-18; Matthew 28:1-15

Further: 1 Corinthians 15

There is a note of finality in the expression ‘dead and buried’ - and there is no doubt Jesus was truly ‘dead and buried.’ The Pharisees were confident they had done everything humanly possible to ensure that His body remained in the tomb. However, God had other plans!

THE STONE Early on the first day of the week, a group of devoted women set out for the tomb, to complete the embalming process with ointment and spices they had bought. They had observed Jesus’ crucifixion and burial, and how the Pharisees had sealed the tomb. As they walked along, they were concerned about how they would move the huge stone from the doorway. Perhaps they hoped the guards would move it to allow them in. Imagine their surprise when they got near, to see it already rolled away!

THE SURPRISE Not only was the stone rolled away - but upon entering the tomb they found that Jesus’ body was not there! As they stood there in confusion, suddenly two angels in gleaming, white clothes appeared. The women fell to the ground, shocked and over-awed by their presence. The two angels spoke these wonderful words, “Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here - He is risen!”

The women rushed back into the city and breathlessly told the disciples all that had happened and the angels’ words. However to most of them, it sounded too far-fetched and they did not believe them! Peter and John however, ran to see for themselves.

John got to the tomb first and looking in saw that it was empty and just the linen clothes were lying there. When Peter arrived however, he went straight in. As he looked at the condition and shape of the burial clothes, he saw immediately that no human hands had removed the body; it had simply vanished out of them! Finally, John joined him inside and as we read in John 20:8 “He saw and believed.” The two men went home, wondering deeply about what had happened.

Mary returned to the sepulchre, and waited there alone, weeping quietly in confusion and sorrow. Suddenly, she heard a voice nearby, and half-blinded by her tears she looked and saw a man standing beside her. Kindly He asked, “Woman, why do you weep? Who are you looking for?” Presuming it was the gardener, Mary said, “Sir, if you have taken Him away, tell me where you

have laid Him, and I will get Him.” The man simply replied, “Mary.” Her heart leaped within her - it was Jesus! “Master!” she replied joyfully and attempted to touch Him. He didn’t allow her to do this, instead giving her a message to take to the disciples. “Go to My brethren,” He said, “and tell them I ascend to My Father and your Father, to My God and your God.” (v17). Mary was overjoyed, and ran to tell the disciples, “I have seen the Lord!” [John 20:18]

THE STORY Meanwhile, the terrified soldiers [who under Roman Law were now in danger of the death penalty for allowing their ‘prisoner’ to escape] went and reported to the chief Priests everything that had happened overnight - including how an angel had appeared and rolled the stone away from the door. Ignoring the significance of the soldiers’ story, these stubborn, unbelieving men preferred to bribe the soldiers to lie about the matter.

“Say that His disciples came by night, and stole Him away while we slept,” they said, “and we’ll make sure you don’t get in trouble!” So we read, the soldiers “took the money and did as they were instructed.” And so this foolish story lingers until today.

There was not, of course, the slightest chance that Peter and John, or any of the others would have attempted such a stupid fraud! In fact, all the Apostles were later killed after testifying to the truth of Christ’s resurrection, and no-one willingly dies for what they know is a lie. Jesus was seen alive by many in fact, over a period of forty days following His resurrection! [Acts 1:3] He appeared to the two men on the road to Emmaus [Luke 24:13-35] and to the disciples on at least two occasions. [John 20:19-31] In addition to Mary, He also showed Himself to some of the other women (Matthew 28:9) and to a crowd of more than 500 people! [1 Corinthians 15:6]

Of course, He also appeared to Saul of Tarsus some time later, on the road to Damascus [Acts 9:1-6]. Finally, before the eyes of His disciples, He ascended again into Heaven; and angels left the stunned disciples with the wonderful words, “This same Jesus who has been taken from you into Heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen Him go into Heaven!” [Acts 1:11] Read 1 Corinthians 15 for a marvellous summary by the Apostle Paul, of the certainty of Christ’s resurrection and the certain hope we have because of it!

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. Why did the women come to the tomb?

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2. What did they do when they saw the stone was rolled away, and heard the angels’ message?

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3. What did Peter and John find when they came to the tomb?

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4. What did Mary know as soon as the man in the garden spoke her name?

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5. What message did Jesus give her?

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The Saviour's Birth

Key Verse:

“Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.”

1 Timothy 1:15

Extra: What evidence can you suggest for the importance of Jesus' birth?

Level 5 lesson 43

Read Matthew 1:18-25

Further: Luke 2:1-20

For most people, Christmas is a wonderful and exciting time; a time of celebration and sharing, of 'goodwill to men.' Sadly, for so many, that is all it means; the real significance of Christmas and its message of hope and salvation for mankind, has been buried beneath an 'avalanche' of commercialism. Although to most of us the story will be familiar, let's look at it again as Christmas approaches once more.

UNIQUE: Never has there been, nor will there ever be, a birth like that of our Saviour! It was unique - the only one of its kind. Foretold throughout Old Testament Scripture, God the Son became Man and entered human history, as the promised "Seed (or offspring) of the woman" in Genesis 3:15; and the "child born" in Isaiah 9:6-7.

Matthew 1 tells us that Joseph, a just and godly man, was engaged to be married to a young virgin named Mary. Discovering her to be pregnant, he assumed she had been unfaithful. We read though, that painful as that thought must have been, he did not wish to humiliate her, but "had in mind to divorce her quietly." (v19)

However, before he could do so, an angel of the Lord appeared to him and told him what had really happened. "Don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife. What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit," he said (v20). The angel then added, "She will give birth to a son!" This would fulfil the words of Isaiah 7:14, "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son and they will call Him Immanuel, which means, God with us." This was to be no ordinary baby; His conception was a miracle of the Almighty, Sovereign God! He was to be 'God in human form.' Jesus had no human father; Joseph was merely His legal father. His true 'Father' was God.

PURPOSE: Verse 21 tells us His name was to be called "Jesus" which means, 'God saves.' This was the great purpose behind our Lord's birth; "For He shall save His people from their sins!" It is vital that we understand this. So many people have wrong ideas about why Jesus was born;

they think He came merely to teach or reform mankind. Scripture however, tells us plainly that He came to save lost, guilty sinners; condemned to death and eternal punishment, separated from their loving, creator God. Of course, His birth alone could not save us, but in becoming human, the immortal, everlasting God was enabled to take our place in death, on the Cross. Through His death and punishment on our behalf, we can be saved; by acknowledging our sin and receiving Him by faith as Saviour. There is no other way. [Acts 4:12]

A CHILD BORN: So it happened, that when Cyrenius was governor of Syria, the Roman Emperor Caesar announced a national census. Everyone was to return to their ancestral home to be numbered and taxed. This meant that Joseph, a descendant of King David, and Mary [who at this point was heavily pregnant], had to travel south to Bethlehem. Finding no room in the inn, they were forced to shelter in a stable.

There in the most humble surroundings imaginable, was born the One who would divide history and time. We read, "And she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped Him in strips of cloth, and laid Him in a manger." (Luke 2:7) Our calendar is a profound testimony to the significance of His birth. How wonderful and appropriate, that it should be the event to which the past looks forward, and the future will ever look back!

ANGELIC ANNOUNCEMENT: The first ones to receive news of the amazing event were a few shepherds in the fields watching over their flocks at night. The quiet stillness of that starlit night was broken as the Angel of the Lord appeared before them and the glory of the Lord shone all around them. Dumbstruck with fear, the simple shepherds cowered from him in terror, before he assured them, "Do not be afraid, I bring you good news of great joy." Then he made this stupendous proclamation, "Today in the town of David, a Saviour has been born to you; He is Christ the Lord!"

Immediately we read, in an amazing display of heavenly glory and majesty, the sky was filled with perhaps the greatest burst of praise ever heard, as a myriad of angels sang, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill towards men." Will you join with them this Christmas, in praising God for His most wonderful gift?

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. 1a. Who was the Father of Jesus? 1b. Why is the name 'Immanuel' significant?
2. Why was Jesus born in Bethlehem and not elsewhere?
3. By whom and to whom was the first announcement of Jesus' birth made?
4. What divides time and history?
5. 5a. Have YOU asked Jesus to be your Saviour? 5b. How can we help you further?

Jehovah's Servant

Key Verse:

“Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture, and told him the good news about Jesus.”

Acts 8:35

Extra: Can you find any other Old Testament passages that tell of Jesus?

Level 5 lesson 44

Read Isaiah 53 Further Psalm 22

Having just considered the birth of the Lord Jesus, let's look again at a wonderful chapter in the Old Testament: Isaiah 53. This was written about 650 years before Christ, and is a marvellous prophecy concerning the life, sufferings, death and resurrection of our Saviour. While it is true that our Lord's name is not mentioned in the chapter, we know that He alone fulfilled all that is recorded in it. Philip the Evangelist, when asked by the Ethiopian eunuch who the prophet spoke of, also told him it referred to Jesus [see the Memory Verse].

To make the connection, go back to Isaiah 52:13 and you will see that the prophecy is concerning One whom Jehovah (God) calls, "My Servant." Looking down to ch 53:11 you will notice the words, "My righteous servant." The whole section talks about God's servant, and only Jesus could truly lay claim to that title!

He came into this world and took upon Himself the "form of a servant." He could say, "I am come...to do Thy will O God," and, "I do always those things which please the Father." On another occasion He said, "The Son of Man is not come to be served – but to serve!" He truly was God's righteous servant! He obeyed and pleased His Father God in every way.

HIS LIFE: Firstly, He was to be God's "tender plant" (v2). This was particularly true in His infancy, for during that period, God sheltered and protected Him in a special way from those who maliciously sought to destroy Him. Matthew 2:13, 14 is an example of this, where King Herod ordered the death of all baby boys in Bethlehem, under 2 years of age. The last Scripture reference in relation to His childhood tells us, "He grew in stature and in favour with God and man." We can understand this when we consider His perfect character and how this would endear Him to people. Yet as He grew to manhood, and began His ministry, we find Him "despised and rejected" (v3). People were happy to benefit from His miracles, and the blessings He brought them, but they would not recognise Him as 'Messiah.' May we, through God's grace, receive

and honour Him as Saviour and Lord, and never despise or reject Him!

In v4, we see that He was to 'bear the people's grief's and sorrows' – make them His own. But when people saw how He suffered by doing so, they would wrongly assume He was being punished and chastened by God for His own misdeeds. Verses 5&6 clearly correct that wrong perception of Him.

HIS SUFFERINGS: There we see clearly that He was wounded (or pierced) - for OUR iniquities! v6 tells us, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all." Jesus suffered and died on the Cross - for us! Why? As He said in Luke 19:10, this was the purpose for which He had come; "To seek and to save those who are lost."

Verses 7&8, tell of His being "led to the slaughter" and the denial of justice to Him. All this was true of Jesus. He didn't resist when ill-treated and wrongly accused; but remained silent. He endured a shameful death on Calvary's Cross - so that you and I could be forgiven!

HIS DEATH: Isaiah speaks of Him being "cut off from the land of the living" and buried in a rich man's grave (v8, 9). Here again, Jesus fulfilled this in a remarkable way. He died in the prime of life, at age 33, and was buried in Joseph's tomb (Matthew 27:57-61). But Isaiah's prophecy clearly shows that this was not to be the end, as Jesus' enemies had hoped. After 'bruising Him' and making His soul an offering for sin, God's purpose was that Jesus "prolong His days, enjoy prosperity and be satisfied," (v10, 11) and this could only be achieved in one glorious way.

HIS RESURRECTION: Yes! This was when Jesus would enjoy the fruits of His victory! He rose from the dead, a triumphant victor over sin, death and all the forces of darkness! Man thought he had brought His work to a final end by crucifying Him. In actual fact, it was all part of God's eternal purposes that His Son should die and rise from the dead; so accomplishing sinful man's redemption.

Christ was not defeated, but all-victorious! He sits now and forever in exalted glory, as the Lamb of God. Praise God! Isaiah 53 is a wonderful prophecy of Jesus; one of many in the Old Testament whose exact fulfilment proves Scripture to be the Word of God.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. What proves that Isaiah 53 refers to Jesus?

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2. How did men of the world treat the Lord Jesus?

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3. Why did Jesus suffer and die?

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4. What was God's purpose for His Son?

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5. What does prophecy prove the Old Testament to be?

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PSSM, 1-2A (G2) 93 Dominion Rd, Mt Eden, Auckland 1024 or scan & email to info@biblediscovery.org.nz