

27:26 *Scourged Jesus*- As soon as the sentence was pronounced: You shall be crucified, the victim was stripped naked and fastened to a post about as high as the waist and then flogged. Josephus twice mentions that the body was stripped naked and flogged until the flesh hung down in shreds. 13 stripes were against His breast, 26 on the back. They probably chanted them. He may have had a slab of iron between His teeth to grit against. Men were known to have bitten their tongues in two during the whipping. John Pollock explains that the victim was stretched with hands above his head, whipped by naked slaves with a device of three leather thongs laced with pieces of sharpened bone, whilst a clerk stood with a slab on which to take down confessions (2). .

Scourging was usually "accomplished by tying the victim's wrists to an iron ring set about knee level, so that he would be bent over; or, facing or backed to a column, the wrists would be tied overhead. There were probably two scourgers, standing on each side, each with whips five or six feet long ending in two leather thongs tipped with metal. As the scourging whips fell across the victim's back they would wrap around his body at times lacerating his body front and back, so that scourge marks soon covered all of his body except the head, feet, and forearms... It was uncommon for the Romans to both scourge and crucify a person. Why was it done to Jesus? It has been conjectured by some scholars that Pilate thought by excessive scourging and beating of Jesus the Jewish council would be satisfied. They weren't" (3).

Significantly, very few actual details are given by the Gospel writers of both the scourging and the crucifixion. It could be that they felt it impossible to dwell upon these things; or it could be that they and their readers knew what was involved in these practices, and we are left to dwell upon them in our own imagination. We are intended to reconstruct in our own minds what may have happened... We have a solemn duty towards Him to do this. This is perhaps why the tenses change so dramatically in the records. Take just Mk. 15:23-26: "They offered... they crucify... and part... casting lots... crucified... was written". These arresting changes are surely to encourage us to re-live it all. Mark speaks of "they crucify him", going on to say that "then are there two crucified with him" (Mk. 15:38 RV), whereas Luke records the act in the past tense. Mark's present tenses are arresting: "plaiting...they clothe him...they smote..." (:17,19 RV). Perhaps Mark is seeking consciously to make us imagine it all as going on before our eyes. Mt. 27:38 RV has a similar dramatic change: "Then are there crucified with him...".

All men usually screamed out something, anything, in the hope that the lashing would therefore be shortened. The Lord's silence at this time would have been yet one more thing which awed His tormentors. There were runnels, Pollock says, in which the blood drained away. The scourging would already have been done twice for the thieves. The Angel watchers of the skies would have peered down into that blood, as they did in cherubic form into the blood on the mercy seat. The blood of the Son of God was treated by men as something ordinary,

thoughtlessly mixed with that of criminals, and was trodden under foot. Perhaps it was to this aspect of the Lord's sufferings and insult that Heb. 10:29 refers to, in describing the crucifixion (and the Lord's *re-crucifixion* by fallen believers) as counting the blood of the covenant an unholy thing, and thereby treading underfoot the Son of God (cp. Heb. 6:6 RV mg "*while they crucify the son of God*", suggesting that once this ongoing re-crucifixion stops, men can be forgiven). The despising and treading under of that blood in a literal sense only occurred at the scourging. It was observed by some first century writers that the length of time it took a crucifixion victim to die was related to the severity of the scourging. The Lord's relatively quick death may therefore (although not necessarily) reflect the brutality with which He was treated at this time. When Peter speaks of how we are healed by Christ's "stripes" (1 Pet. 2:24), uses an especially intense word to describe the scourging. It could be that he somehow saw or heard about the scourging, and saw it as parallel to Christ suffering for us "on the tree". The Lord's bloody sweat in Gethsemane has been identified as hemohidrosis, an extreme nervous state in which there is haemorrhage into the sweat glands, and therefore the skin becomes fragile and tender. This would have meant that flogging, the carrying of the cross and the constant friction between His back and the rough wood would have been agonizing. Hemohidrosis also produces severe chills. The Lord would have been shivering in the cold darkness of His final hours, with every involuntary movement causing agony to the nerves which the nails purposefully transfixed.

And delivered to be crucified- Having been flogged until the skin was left hanging in bloody shreds (Josephus), His clothes would have stuck to the skin. Taking the clothes off would have ripped some shreds away. The process of dressing and undressing would have done the same. And then the cross was laid on that bare back. The word translated "delivered" or "betrayed" is commonly used in the records. Judas handed over the Lord to the Jews, the Jews handed Him over to Pilate and the Romans, and they handed Him back to the Jews to crucify. All this was only how things seemed on earth, because all was in the Father's hands. The Lord must surely have meditated upon this- that He was giving Himself, and they were merely the process He was using to do that.

The moment of the Lord being delivered over by Pilate is so emphasized. There are few details in the record which are recorded verbatim by all the writers (Mt. 27:26; Mk. 15:15; Lk. 23:25; Jn. 19:16). The Lord had prophesied this moment of handing over, as if this was something which He dreaded (Mk. 9:31; 10:33); that point when He was outside the legal process, and must now face His destruction. The Angels reminded the disciples: "Remember *how* he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men" (Lk. 24:6,7). The emphasis is on "*How*", with what passion and emphasis. Rom. 4:25 makes this moment of handing over equivalent to His actual death: " Who was *delivered* (s.w.) for our offences, and raised again for our justification". So much stress is put on this moment of being delivered over to crucifixion. The Gospel records stress that Pilate delivered Him up; but in fact God did (Rom. 8:32); indeed, the Lord delivered Himself up (Gal. 2:20; Eph. 5:2,25).

Always the same word is used. These passages also stress that He delivered Himself up, and was delivered up, *for us*. It was *our salvation* which motivated Him at the moment of being delivered up. Perhaps it was at that moment that He had the greatest temptation to walk through the midst of them and back to Galilee. As the crowd surged forward and cheered, knowing they'd won the battle of wills with Pilate... "take ye him and crucify him" ringing in His mind... this was it. This was the end. How He must have been tempted to pray again His prayer: "Let this cup pass from me...". Jerusalem was a small town by modern standards, with no more than 10,000 inhabitants. There must have been faces in that crowd which, through swollen eyes, He recognized; some whose children had benefited from His miracles, whose ears had heard His discourses with wonderment. The emphasis on this moment of delivering up is so great that there must have been an especial sacrifice on the Lord's part. But He "gave himself up" to *God* not men (1 Pet. 2:23); He knew He was giving Himself as an offering to *God* as the crowd came forward and the soldiers once again led Him. The almost terrifying thing is that *we*, for the sake of our identity with Christ, are also "delivered up to death" (2 Cor. 4:11). We are asked to share, in principle, the height of devotion that He reached in that moment. Analyzing 2 Cor. 4:10,11 in more detail, we find a number of parallels:

v. 10	v. 11
Always	For we which live are alway
bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus	delivered unto death for Jesus' sake
that the life also of Jesus	that the life also of Jesus
might be manifest in our body	might be made manifest in our mortal flesh.

The second parallel is significant. To be delivered unto death for Jesus' sake is to bear about in an ongoing sense His crucifixion. This means that His being "delivered over" was seen by Paul as a cameo of His whole sufferings on the cross.

27:27 The soldiers of the governor- Being Roman soldiers, these were likely Gentiles from many different nations within the Roman empire. The Lord was abused not only by Jews but by a wide range of Gentiles- the very ones for whom He was dying. When we do things in love for those who are in the throes of hatred against us (and many are in domestic situations where this has to be done by the believer in Christ)- then we are fellowshiping His sufferings at this time in this way.

The whole battalion- Similar to the way the record repeatedly stresses that *all* the chief priests, the *whole* Sanhedrin, condemned the Lord to death. The point is that group mentality is far more powerful than we think, and leads even good men like Nicodemus and Joseph, and perhaps the

Centurion who came to confess that "Truly this was the Son of God", to do things which are far beyond the evil intention within any one individual mind. Again, we see in the crucifixion of Jesus where human nature leads in its ultimate end. It comes to full term in nothing less than the crucifixion of God's Son. One of the ways in which our nature operates is in tandem with others. Many have noted that the sum total of human evil in this world is likely more than the sum of all the individual 'evil' of every human being combined. The 'extra' factor in the equation is provided by the way in which humans in group mode can end up thinking and acting far more extremely than all the individual 'evil' within each of them as individuals. This is why the New Testament parable of 'satan' uses the term not only for individuals and for abstract human sin, but for sinful organizations and group entities. I have commented upon this several times throughout my *The Real Devil*.

Gathered around Him- This continues the theme of the Lord's passion causing men to gather and unite, either for Him or against Him. We note how John adds that Herod and Pilate were reconciled together- over the issue of Jesus. And this is what response to the fact of His suffering and death continues to do today. If we as believers are *not* united around Him, we are allowing our own traditions to become an obstacle to the process of unity which the Lord's death is intended to achieve. Our refusal to unite, e.g. by forbidding brethren from communion and remembrance of Him, is to work against the intention of the cross.

27:28 Stripped Him- Naked? To be undressed is used by Paul as a metaphor for human death (2 Cor. 5:4 s.w.), and to be clothed upon is used by Paul to mean a change of nature. The Lord may have seen in this mockery a strange foretaste of the death and change of nature which awaited Him. Through all His sufferings, the hand of providence was giving Him encouragement. And that happens in our lives too. The Lord would've thought of His own story of the wounded man who was stripped (Lk. 10:30 s.w.). He was both the Samaritan Saviour and the wounded man, in that He identified so fully with us in our moral tragedy. The same LXX word is found in "They stripped Joseph out of his coat" (Gen. 37:23); was Joseph naked in the pit?

27:29 Platted a crown of thorns- The thorns were growing between the cobbles of the courtyard? Or were they using thorns on their courtyard fire? The thorns on the head would have reminded Him that He was being temporarily overcome by the result of the curse in Eden. As with several aspects of His mocking, His tormentors unknowingly gave Him spiritual stimulus by what they did. His mind was certainly in Eden, for He spoke of the Kingdom as "paradise", with evident allusion to Eden (Lk. 23:43). Note that the Lord was beaten up at least three times: by the Jewish guards, by Herod's men and by the Roman soldiers. In a literal sense He was bruised for our iniquities, and chastised for us to obtain the peace of sin forgiven (Is. 53:5). And the Father surely foresaw all this back in Gen. 3:15, where the promised seed was to be *bruised*. He willed (*not* "pleased", as AV) this bruising, and this putting to grief (Is. 53:10). The parallel here

between the bruising, beating and putting to grief may suggest that the beatings up ('bruising') really grieved the Lord. And note that the final sacrifice of which Is. 53 speaks was not *only* achieved by the hours spent hanging on the cross. This earlier beating and abusing was just as much a part of His final passion, as, in essence, His whole life was a living out of the principles of the cross. It has been suggested that the crown of thorns was not only a mockery, but a significant part of the physical torture of crucifixion. If the net of nerves and veins under the skin of the scalp are pierced, profuse bleeding and stunning head ache would occur. His hair would therefore have been bloody. It would have been a wreath, a *stephanos* similar to that worn by Tiberius. The mock homage to the crowned Saviour-Lord was surely in the Lord's mind at His ascension, when all the Angels of God bowed before Him in true worship (Heb. 1:6).

A reed- This is the same word translated "pen". The hint was that the Lord was taking note. All was written and would be judged when the books are opened.

Mocked Him- The Lord had foreseen that the Gentiles would "mock" Him (20:19 s.w.). Matthew gives more attention to the repeated mocking of the Lord than the other Gospels (27:29,31,41).

Hail- Literally, 'Be happy'.

J.D. Crossan mentions a Jewish tradition, quoting Mishnah passages to support it, that the bruised scapegoat had scarlet wool tied to it, and that the Jews spat on the scapegoat in order to place their sins upon it (4). It could be that the Roman soldiers were doing all this in mockery of this tradition. It would have given the Lord something more to fill His holy mind with. He knew that He was actually doing what they were mockingly suggesting- carrying Israel's sins. God worked even through the spitting and mocking of men to work out the finest details of our redemption. The spitting is in the context of their mocking His Kingship. "Hail, King of the Jews!" was in parody of 'Ave, Caesar'. It was customary to give a kiss of homage to royalty. Their parody of this was to spit at Him, in the face, according to the type of Job 30:10. Earlier, at the trial, the Jews had spat in His face (Mt. 26:67). Now He tasted Roman spittle. And this was the face from which the glory of God had shone (Mk. 9:15?). One of the themes of the crucifixion records is that the same abuse and suffering was repeated to the Lord. Hence the frequent usage of the continuous tense. During the trial by Pilate, the Lord underwent mock worship and spitting (Jn. 19:3). Then later it was mock worship, spitting, hitting on the head (Mt. 27:29,30). And then hitting on the head, spitting, mock worship (Mk. 15:19,20). It seems they alternated bruising / spitting on Christ with bruising / kneeling before Him in mock homage. The reed was used as a mock diadem, although instead of touching His shoulder with it they hit Him on the head with it. They put it in His hand as a sceptre and then snatched it back to hit Him on the head with it. Wave after wave of the same treatment. Notice how many times the word "again" features in the Greek text (*palin*). This is the essence of our temptations. And it was a big theme in the Lord's final human experience. Likewise a comparison of the records shows that "Come down..." was clearly said more than once, the continuous tenses notwithstanding (Mt.

27:40 cp. Mk. 15:30). However, it is worth cataloguing the use of continuous tenses in this part of the record: The crowd *kept on* crying out (as demons did), "Crucify him" (Mt. 27:23); the soldiers *kept on* clothing Him (Mt. 27:28), *kept on* coming to Him and kept on saying... (Jn. 19:3 Gk.), Pilate *kept on seeking* (imperfect) to deliver the Lord (Jn. 19:12), thereby agitating the tension in the Lord's mind. They *kept on* kneeling (27:29), *kept on* spitting (v.30), *kept on* passing in front of Him on the cross and *kept on* shaking their heads (v. 39), *kept on* saying "...save thyself", *kept on* mocking and asking Him to come down from the cross (vv. 40,41), the soldiers *kept on* coming to Him and offering Him their vinegar in mock homage (Lk. 23:36), they *kept on* offering Him the pain killer. They *kept on and on and on*. This is an undoubted theme.

The events of the crucifixion were so packed with fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy and shadows that the Lord's discernment of them must have given Him a wonderful boost of strength, in knowing who He was and where He was destined. For example, when they put a broken reed in his hand as a mock sceptre, His mind would have flown to the Messianic Is. 42:3: "A bruised reed shall he not break... he *shall* bring forth judgment", as they mocked Him for His apparent inability to do.

27:30 The question is to why Gentile soldiers would unleash such hatred upon Jesus, when the crucifixion of a Jew was just another job for them to do. We somehow do not imagine them doing this to the thieves or other crucifixion victims. I conclude that there was something in the Lord which forced men to either respond to Him, or go the other way in assuming that unless He was as He claimed, then He must be the worst of all and worthy of all hatred. We see the same effect upon men today, even if social norms mean that we express the passions [both for and against Him] in less dramatic and more restrained terms.

27:31 *Dressed Him in His own garments*- The record that they put the Lord's own clothes on Him and then led Him to crucifixion conflicts with contemporary records of the victim being led out naked, or certainly without his own outer clothes. Christ was revealed, or 'revealed himself' (Gk.) on the cross, when He took away our sins (1 Jn. 3:5). This may be John referring to how he had witnessed Christ crucified naked. Yet we know that the Lord wore His outer robe right up to the impaling. It may be that the whipping and abuse He had suffered was far beyond what the soldiers had the right to minister. There were special directives concerning the need for the victim to die by crucifixion, not at the hands of the soldiers. It may be that they wanted to cover up the illegal marks on the body by making the Lord go to the cross fully dressed. In which case, again we see how He suffered the very *worst* of man's machinations. The Lord having His own clothes put back on Him meant that He would have been dressed in blood sprinkled garments for the walk to Golgotha. Again His holy mind would have been on the Messianic prophecies of Is.

63 about a Messiah with blood sprinkled garments lifted up in glorious victory. Or perhaps He saw the connection to Lev. 8:30, where the priests had to have blood sprinkled garments in order to begin their priestly work. This would have sent His mind to us, for whom He was interceding. Likewise when He perceived that His garment would not be rent, He would have joyfully perceived that He was indeed as the High Priest whose garment was not to be rent (Ex. 39:23).

Led Him away to crucify Him- The Greek word translated "led away" is used about 10 times in the Gospels for the leading away of Jesus to death. It occurs in another context, in 7:13,14, where the Lord spoke of how wide and common is the way that 'leads away to' destruction compared to the way which 'leads away to' eternal life. He was being led away to destruction; He was sharing the path of all condemned sinners. This is a great theme of the crucifixion accounts- that the Lord identified totally with the position of condemned sinners. The logic is that by living the life of the flesh, we are led away to destruction; and yet by being led away to destruction with the Lord, in sharing His death, we are in fact being led away to life.

Tradition has it that the victim had to hold their hands out to receive the stake, which they then had to carry. The Lord's prophecy of Peter's crucifixion thus describes it as Peter stretching out his hands and being led to his death (Jn. 21:18). Yet the Lord emphasized in His teaching that we must *take up* the cross, as He did (Mk. 8:34; 10:21). This might just suggest that in line with the Lord's willing death, giving up of His life rather than it being taken from Him, He bent down and picked up the stake before the soldiers had the chance to offer it to Him. I imagine doing this in a deft manner. The deftness of the way He broke that bread apart and held the cup comes out in Mt. 26:26. He knew what that breaking of bread was going to mean. His willingness would have been such a contrast to the unwilling hesitation of the thieves and other victims. The soldiers must have been blind indeed to still mock Him, despite all these indications that He was more than mere man. That piece of wood that was laid upon Him by the Father, however the Lord physically took it up, represented our sins, which were laid upon Him (Is. 53:6); your laziness to do your Bible readings early this morning, my snap at the woman in the bus, his hatred of his mother in law... that piece of wood was the symbol of our sins, every one of them. This is what we brought upon Him. It was our laziness, our enmity, our foolishness, *our weak will...* that necessitated the death of Jesus in this terrible way. He went through with it all "to make an end of sins" (Dan. 9:26). Will we do our little bit in responding? The marks of His sufferings will be in Him eternally, and thereby we will be eternally reminded of the things we now only dimly appreciate (Rev. 5:6; Zech. 13:6).

The walk from the courthouse to Golgotha was probably about 800m (half a mile). One of the soldiers would have carried the sign displaying the Lord's Name and crime. The thieves were

probably counting the paces (maybe the crowd was chanting them?). You know how it is when doing a heavy task, 'Just three more boxes to lug upstairs... just two more... last one'. But the Lord was above this. Of that I'm sure. Doing any physically strenuous task that takes you to the end of your strength, there is that concentration on nothing else but the job in hand. Hauling a heavy box or load, especially in situations of compulsion or urgency, it becomes irrelevant if you bump into someone or crush a child's toy beneath your heavy feet. But the Lord rose above. He turned and spoke to the women. Luke as a doctor knew that suffering makes one self-centred. It is perhaps because of this that he especially seems to concentrate on the wonder of the way in which the Lord looked out of His own agony to be so concerned with that of others. A.D. Norris has commented (*The Gospel Of Mark*): "It is he who reports the Lord's prayer for Simon Peter (22:31); who recounts the Lord's sympathetic warning to the women of Jerusalem (23:27-31); and who speaks of the Lord's forgiveness for His crucifiers, and remission for the penitent thief (23:34,43)" .

27:32 *A man of Cyrene, Simon by name*- Cyrene was where there was a strongly orthodox Jewish community (cp. Acts 6:9). Simon was probably dark skinned, a countryman, a simple man, who had perhaps come up to Jerusalem in his zeal to keep Passover. What a comfort it was to the Lord to see a black man carrying His cross; for He had earlier said that *all* His true followers would carry the cross behind Him (Mt. 10:38; 16:24). The Hebrew writer seemed to see Simon as typical of us all when writing of how we must go out of the city with the Lord, "bearing his reproach" (Heb. 13:12,13, probably using 'reproach' as a parallel to 'the cross'). He would have seen in Simon a prototype of all His future, suffering, humiliated followers; "impressed" by the predestined calling, almost against our will, to carry His cross (Mt. 27:32 RV mg.). And was it accident that this prototype was almost certainly a black man, when perhaps ultimately it may appear that a large proportion of the faithful body of the Lord Jesus will have been black people? If indeed Simon was a black Jew (cp. modern Falashas) who had come up to keep the Passover, it would have been annoying beyond words for him to be made unclean by the blood of the Lord, which was inevitably on the stake after His first attempt at bearing it after His flogging. Not to mention the shame for a zealous Jew in having to carry the cross of this Jesus of Nazareth. Yet it would seem that he was later converted, and he in turn converted his wife and son (Mk. 15:21 cp. Rom. 16:13). Mark rarely records proper nouns, but he makes a special effort to mention that Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus. It would therefore seem that these men were well known in the early church. Simon may be the "Simeon called Niger" ('the black one') of Acts 13:1. He is listed there next to Lucius, who was also from Cyrene. The thief and the centurion were likewise converted, and the faith of Joseph, Nicodemus and probably others was brought out into the open by the cross. Like Samson, the Lord won victories even in His death. The spiritual turn-around in Simon is a type of what is experienced by all whom the Lord compels to carry His cross. He was passing by, going somewhere else, full of his own plans, going about to establish his own righteousness... and then, out of the blue, he was called to what he much later realized was the greatest honour a man could be called to: to accompany the Son of God and carry His cross, right to the end. We are left to imagine him plonking it down, as if to say to Jesus 'Now you've got to do the rest', and then slipping off into the crowd.

Another reading of Simon is possible. Simon is a Greek name, and the names of his sons are Greco-Roman. The way he is described as "coming out of the field" (Lk. 23:26) could imply that he was working, doing what was improper on a feast day, because he was a Gentile. It could be that he simply lived and worked near Jerusalem, he wasn't a religious guy, and like Saul out looking for lost cattle, he was going some place else...until the Lord as it were arrested him with the message of the cross.

To carry the cross- "The crossbar was carried... weighing 34 to 57 kg., was placed across the nape of the victim's neck and balanced along both shoulders. Usually the outstretched arms then were tied to the crossbar" (5). This means that the Lord would have had His shoulders bowed forward as He walked to Golgotha, with both His hands lifted up against His chest. He evidently foresaw this in some detail when He described His mission to man as a shepherd carrying His lost sheep on both shoulders. Let's forever forget the picture of a happy, quiet lamb snugly bobbling along on the shepherd's shoulders. We are surely meant to fill in the details in the parables. The sheep, his underside covered in faeces and mud, would have been terrified; in confusion he would have struggled with the saviour shepherd. To be carried on His shoulders would have been a strange experience; he would have struggled and been awkward, as the shepherd stumbled along, gripping both paws against His chest with His uplifted hands. This was exactly the Lord's physical image as He stumbled to the place of crucifixion. He evidently saw the cross as a symbol of us, His struggling and awkward lost sheep. And every step of the way along the Via Dolorosa, Yahweh's enemies reproached every stumbling footstep of His anointed (Ps. 89:51). It was all this that made Him a true King and our unquestioned leader- for on His shoulders is to rest the authority of the Kingdom (Is. 9:5), because He bore His cross upon the same shoulders.

John says that the Lord went out bearing His cross. Luke says that Simon was asked to carry the hinder part of the cross behind Him. Matthew and Mark say Simon carried the cross. Mk. 15:22 (Gk.) says that the soldiers carried Jesus to Golgotha. J.B. Phillips renders it: "They got him to a place Golgotha" . It would seem that the Lord collapsed, perhaps fainting. If He was crucified on an olive tree (excavations of crucified men suggest this is what was used), it would not have been simply because of the weight of the stake. Take a picture of Him lying there, with the face that was marred more than the children of men pressed into the hot dust of that Jerusalem street. And some human fool probably said something like 'Come on, get up' (doubtless with embellishments). If indeed He did faint, there would have been that sense of 'coming round', the "Where am I?", the memory and consciousness flooding back. "Have I died and been resurrected?" No, as some nameless soldier kicked Him and told Him to get up.

John's statement that " He went out, bearing the cross for Himself" as He walked to Golgotha is a real emphasis, seeing that it was *as* He came out that it was necessary for them to make Simon carry the cross. John takes a snapshot of that moment, and directs our concentration to the Lord at that moment, determined to carry it to the end, even though in fact He didn't. It is this picture of following the Lord carrying *His* cross which the Lord had earlier asked us to make the model

of our lives. We are left to assume that the two criminals followed Him in the procession. They were types of us, the humble and the proud, the selfless and the selfish, the two categories among those who have been asked to carry the cross and follow the Lord in His 'last walk'.

The word John uses for 'bearing' is translated (and used in the sense of) 'take up' in 10:31. It was as if John saw as significant the Lord's willingness to take up the cross Himself, without waiting for it to be forced upon Him as it probably was on the other two. And there is a clear lesson for us, who fain would carry something of that cross. And yet the similarity of meaning within this word for 'taking up' and 'bearing / carrying' is further instructive. The Lord picked it up and was willing to carry it, but didn't make it to the end of the 'last walk', through understandable human weakness. Amidst the evident challenge of the cross, there is interwoven comfort indeed (as there is in the Lord's eager and positive acceptance of the thief, Joseph and Nicodemus, and the wondrous slowness of the Father's punishment of those ever-so-evil men who did the Lord to death).

The Lord had foreseen most aspects of His death: the handing over, the picking up of the cross, the carrying it, the being lifted up. In Lk. 15:5 the Lord spoke about how He as the good shepherd would carry the lost sheep on His shoulders, *rejoicing*. It is tempting to connect this with the way Christ spoke of His *joy* (Jn. 17:13) just hours before He was arrested. I am not suggesting there was *any* joy at all for the Lord in His carrying of the cross- not in the way we understand joy. But perhaps to Him, in His vocabulary, " my joy" meant something else; as for Him, 'eating' meant not eating food but doing the Father's will (Jn. 4:34). Whatever "rejoicing" , " my joy" meant for the Lord, He had that sense as He carried the cross on His shoulder.

27:33 *Come unto a place*- He didn't carry His cross all the way to Golgotha; He went out of the guard room with His face set towards Golgotha, as it had been so visibly set on Jerusalem a few weeks before. Note the emphasis on "unto", "to", "the place". They arrived. They stopped there. This was it. They arrived at the destination. "Outside the city walls was permanently located the heavy upright wooden stipes, on which the patibulum [which Christ carried] would be secured" (6). The Lord would doubtless have meditated upon it. The cross was waiting. All He had to do was carry the cross bar. His invitation to men to carry the cross to the place where the other part of that instrument of death was already prepared must be seen in this light. The way for our self-crucifixion is prepared. We carry but the cross bar.

Golgotha- Possibly meaning 'The skull of Goliath'. In this case, we have opened up a detailed typological meaning to David's victory over Goliath. He was there as the Lord Jesus fighting sin, and then burying the head of Goliath, the 'man of sin', near Jerusalem.

Luke adds that He turned and spoke to the women on the walk to Golgotha; He looked out of His own agony to the needs of others. This is another theme of the cross. He was even thoughtful for

weak Pilate (Jn. 19:11); for the thief, for the forgiveness of those mocking soldiers, for His mother, for John, for those women lining the Via Dolorosa... And those women, He said, would be destroyed in the condemnation of Jerusalem in AD70. Phil. 2:2-4 makes the point that the essence of the cross is in the way the Lord's mind was so full of concern for *others* throughout the whole wretched process. The Lord's Bible-filled mind would have been aware of Jer. 9:20-22, which prophesied special woe to women in the holocaust of AD70. Those women were condemned. Yet the Lord turned, in His desperate agony, to speak to them. I admit, as I must through every stage of the cross, that I wouldn't have done this. I wouldn't have bothered with them. But He made such effort to at least try to get them to change their minds. They were weeping for Him, but He knew they would not obey His command to leave Jerusalem when it would be surrounded by armies. Neither would their children. On a human level, they must have been so annoying. Young women (if they were alive in AD70 40 years later), probably passively in love with Him, moved to tears at His passion but with no regard for His words and the real implications of His cross. Yet still He tried for them, running the risk of cat calls of 'You can't carry your own cross but you can talk to the girls'.

"If they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?" is packed with allusion to O.T. Scriptures (Ez. 17:24; Jer. 11:16,19; Ps. 1; Jer. 17:5-8). His preceding words to the women were likewise; his quotation from Hos. 10:8 is set in a context so appropriate to the situation He was in. If they did these things to Him, the green and healthy shoot, what would be done to the dry dead wood of Israel...? His concern was always with the sufferings others would experience rather than being lost in His own introspection. Without getting too deeply involved in the actual exposition, a simple lesson emerges: He was not so overpowered by the terrible physicality of His human situation that He ceased to be spiritually aware. His mind was full of the word, not just out of place quotations flooding His subconscious, but real awareness of the spirit of the Father's word and its' intensely personal relevance to Himself. In this He sets a matchless example.

If the crossbeam was tied to the nape of the Lord's neck, it would have been impossible for Him to turn round and talk, as it is specifically stated that He did. I would reconstruct that the Lord collapsed, and Simon was forced to carry the cross, whilst the Lord followed on, scarcely conscious. Before collapsing again, with the result that He was carried to the cross, He used His last and final energy at the time to speak to those women. He used His last bit of mental and physical strength to preach- to women whom He knew were not going to really respond. For He said they should weep for themselves, He knew they would not listen to His warning to flee Jerusalem in AD70. But such was His hopefulness for people, that He still made the effort to communicate rather than get lost within Himself and His own thoughts as I would have tended to.

27:34 *He would not drink it-* To give strong drink to those ready to perish was a well-known custom at crucifixion. The fact victims survived two or three days was only because they were given drink. The Lord didn't simply refuse the pain killer. He took it, tasted it, and then refused

it. Why did He first taste it? Surely He knew the custom, and He knew what it was. Various alternatives arise in the mind, each a source of devotional inspiration:

- Was it that His eyesight was damaged by the punches and He didn't see what it was until He tasted it? "When Jesus therefore saw his mother..." may suggest that He didn't initially recognize her. The Messianic Scriptures mention the affliction of eyesight in Messiah's final suffering. Early crucifixion art shows the Lord with His right eye damaged (as does the Turin shroud). The mucous membrane (the thin slippery tissues which lubricate the human body) would have dried so that "they rip layers of tissues from the eyes every time the pupil is moved or blinked" (C.M. Ward).

- Maybe He realized as He had the cup on His lips that they were giving this to Him in the spirit of Jer. 23:15: to show that He was a false prophet. In this case, for the sake of His respect for the implications of Holy Scripture, He endured a far higher degree of pain.

- Another explanation is that He wanted to speak out loud, saying (several times?) "Father, forgive them", and to perhaps recite Psalm 22. He was so parched from thirst (He had lost body fluid in Gethsemane) that He knew He couldn't speak out loud without some liquid. The dehydration would have made His tongue thicken so that speech was eventually almost impossible. But He only drank enough to moisten His throat, not to deaden any pain. This shows the majestic self-mastery within the Lord; He knew just when to stop, even though it must have been so tempting to keep on drinking.

- Taking the pain killer would not have been a sin, neither would it have theologically damaged the atonement. Perhaps the Lord took it, as doubtless the others did, and then had the self-control to think better of it and give it back. Such was His devotion to the absolute height of identity with us. It makes His action all the more poignant if He first tasted and then refused, rather than just refusing outright.

He was *repeatedly* offered the pain killer, the tense implies. Men offering Him myrrh in (mock) homage would have sent His mind back to the story dear Mary had told Him about the wise men bringing myrrh. And inevitably her tortured mind would have gone back there too. But I have another suggestion. When we read that "someone" offered him a sponge with wine mixed with myrrh (Mk. 15:36; Mt. 27:48), we recall the use of myrrh in preparing bodies for burial (Mk. 14:3; Lk. 23:56; Jn. 12:3; 19:39). Pliny (*Natural History* 14.15.92,107) records: "The finest wine in early days was that spiced with the scent of myrrh... I also find that aromatic wine is constantly made from almost the same ingredient as perfumes, from myrrh". This alerts me to the real possibility that the unnamed bystander who did this was Mary Magdalene. Earlier she had anointed the Lord's body with myrrh "to the burial". And now she has prepared the most expensive form of wine as some sort of pain killer. Perhaps the Lord was so touched by this that

He accepted it, but didn't drink it. His doing this is otherwise very hard to understand. Her love was on one hand inappropriate, and yet the Lord still accepted it, even though He couldn't use it. He could have felt angry with her for tempting Him to the easier way. But He didn't. And in so doing He showed her that the essence of the cross is that there is no easy way. The principles of all this are to be reflected in our cross carrying.

Another alternative presents itself from the Hebrew text of Ps. 69:21: "They gave me also gall". The Hebrew can stand the translation 'poison' (see RSV). Given the extended, agitated torture of crucifixion, there was a custom for close friends to get close enough to the cross to lift up a poisonous substance which the crucified would lick, and thereby die quickly. It is just possible that a friend (or even his mother?) or a sympathetic soldier did this. Again, in this case it would seem that the Lord chose the highest level; our salvation would surely have been theologically achievable if He had taken it. But He chose to attain for us not only salvation, but "such *great* salvation" (Heb. 2:3) by always taking the highest level. He became obedient not only to death, but "even the death of the cross".

One feels that Christ would have been justified in accepting the pain killer that was offered Him in His final agony; but He refused it, it seems to me, in order to achieve the *greatest* salvation for us. He never once used what I have called the principle of Jephthah's vow. In the same spirit, some faithful men of old refused legitimate deliverance from torture so that they might obtain "a better resurrection" (Heb. 11:35). The record of the cross is full of examples of where the Lord in physical terms rejected legitimate comforts in His final hours. Yet throughout His life, He was ever ready to concede to the weakness of those who would genuinely follow Him. The way He spoke about demons without giving His hearers a lecture about the folly of such belief is proof of this. He could have insisted, as we do, on the rejection of such superstitions. But this was not His way. I am not suggesting that *we* have the right to make such concessions in our preaching and baptizing. But He did.

27:35 *They crucified Him*- "And it was the third hour and (not 'when') they crucified Him" (Mk. 15:25) suggests they were waiting for the hour to come. It was in their brief to do it at the third hour. It may be that they got there a little early, and there was an agonizing wait for the third hour. Mark 15 has so many usages of the word "and"; circle them in your Bible (especially AV). This is to emphasize the relentlessness of it all, the repetition of everything, the way it droned remorselessly on. This is a feature of the cross, which we must carry. The crucifixion of Christ was at 9 a.m. He would have willingly laid Himself down on the stake, whereas most victims had to be thrown down on the ground by the soldiers. He gave His life, it wasn't taken from Him. Likewise He *gave* His back to the smiters when they flogged Him; He gave His face to them

when they spoke about pulling out His beard (Is. 50:6). Men usually clenched their fists to stop the nails being driven in, and apparently fingers were often broken by the soldiers to ease their task. Not a bone of the Lord was broken. We can imagine Him willingly opening His palms to the nails; as we, so far away from it all, should have something of a willing acceptance of what being in Him demands of us. It may be that He undressed Himself when they finally reached the place of crucifixion. In similar vein, early paintings of the flogging show the Lord standing there *not* tied to the flogging post, as victims usually were. As He lay there horizontal, His eyes would have been heavenwards, for the last time in His mortality. Perhaps He went through the business of thinking ‘this is the last time I’ll do this...or that...’. How often He had lifted up His eyes to Heaven and prayed (Jn. 11:41; 17:1). And now, this was the last time, except for the final raising of the head at His death. “While four soldiers held the prisoner, [a Centurion] placed the sharp five inch spike in the dead centre of the palm...four to five strokes would hammer the spike deep into the rough plank and a fifth turned it up so that the hand would not slip free” (C.M. Ward, *Treasury Of Praise*). If it is indeed so that a Centurion usually did the nailing, it is a wondrous testimony that it was the Centurion who could say later that “truly this was the Son of God”. The very man who actually nailed the Son of God was not struck dead on the spot, as a human ‘deity’ would have done. God’s patient grace was extended, with the result that this man too came to faith.

The Hebrew language so often reflects the character of God. And His artless self-expression is no clearer seen in the way He inspired the records of the death of His Son. The record of the death of God's Son is something altogether beyond the use of devices as primitive as adjectives. The way in which the actual act of impaling is recorded as just a subordinate clause is perhaps the clearest illustration of this. The way Mary thinks the risen Lord is a gardener is another such. Or the weeping of the women, and Joseph, and Nicodemus (presumably this happened) when the body was taken from the cross, as the nails were taken out: this isn't recorded. Likewise, only Matthew records the suicide of Judas; the Father chose not to emphasize in the records that the man who did the worst a man has ever done or could ever do- to betray the peerless Son of God- actually went and took his own life (and even made a mess of doing that). If it were my son, I would have wanted to emphasize this. But the Almighty doesn't. In similar vein, it is almost incredible that there was no immediate judgment on the men who did the Son of God to death. The judgments of AD70 only came on the next generation. Those middle aged men who stood and derided the Saviour in His time of finest trial: they died, as far as we know, in their beds. And the Roman / Italian empire went on for a long time afterwards, even if God did in fact impute guilt to them for what their soldiers did.

Another hallmark of God's Hand in the record is that what to us are the most obvious OT prophecies are not quoted; e.g. Is. 53:7: "He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth". A human author would have made great capital from such detailed fulfilments. But not so the Almighty. Hebrew, along with all the Semitic languages, has no

superlatives. God doesn't need them. And the record of the cross is a classic example. The record of the resurrection reflects a similar culture. The actual resurrection isn't ever described [in marked contrast to how it is in the uninspired 'gospels']. Instead we read of the impact of His resurrection upon His disciples. The spiritual culture of Almighty God is also shown by the way in which although *all* the Council (Mk. 14:64), including Joseph, condemned Christ to death by crucifixion, God overlooks Joseph's lack of boldness in not contesting this, and speaks of him in such glowing spiritual terms. His 'not consenting unto' Christ's death was deep within him. I would be inclined to say: 'The *least* you could have done was to have abstained from the vote'. But the record is far more positive than that.

For want of a better way of putting it, the spiritual culture of God comes through so sublimely in these records. He began His written revelation with the comment, as an almost throw-away clause, that "He made the stars also" (Gen. 1:16). The vastness of that creation, far more wondrous and extensive than just this planet, is treated *en passant*. The actual resurrection of the Lord Jesus is likewise not recorded; we only learn of it from the recorded witness of those who went to the tomb, and who later met the Lord. The uninspired *Gospel of Peter* 39-42 does record the actual arising of the Lord's dead body; but immediately it becomes evident that this isn't inspired, simply because of the lack of spiritual culture which we are accustomed to in the inspired writings. Likewise it has been observed that God uses "an economy of miracle" when He has acted openly. The record of the disciples' baptism, whether and how the Lord met His mother after the resurrection (for surely He did), Saul changing his name to Paul, Aaron's repentance after the golden calf- all these things are left unrecorded. The Gospel writers do not praise the majestic temple and city of Jerusalem in any way, unlike the uninspired contemporary writers. And that same spiritual culture comes out especially in the account of the crucifixion. It makes a good exercise to read through one of the records, especially John 19, and make a list of the adjectives used. There are virtually none. Read a page of any human novelist or historian: the pages are cluttered with them. Hebrew is deficient in adjectives, and because of this it often uses 'Son of...' plus an abstract noun, instead of an adjective. Thus we read of a "son of peace" (Lk. 10:5,6), or "a man of tongue" (Ps. 140:11 RVmg; AV "an evil speaker").

Divided His garments- There seems to have been something unusual about the Lord's outer garment. The same Greek word *chiton* used in Jn. 19:23,24 is that used in the LXX of Gen. 37:3 to describe Joseph's coat of many pieces. Josephus (*Antiquities* 3.7.4,161) uses the word for the tunic of the High Priest, which was likewise not to be rent (Lev. 21:10). The Lord in His time of dying is thus set up as High Priest, gaining forgiveness for His people, to 'come out' of the grave as on the day of Atonement, pronouncing the forgiveness gained, and bidding His people spread that good news world-wide. The robe was not to be torn, *schizein*. There was to be no schism in it. Ahijah tore his garment into twelve pieces to symbolize the division of Israel (1 Kings 11:30,31). The Lord's coat being unrent may therefore be another reflection of how His death brought about unity amongst His people (Jn. 11:52; 17:21,22). Before Him, there, we simply cannot be divided amongst ourselves. Likewise the net through which the Lord gathers His

people was unbroken (Jn. 21:11). Note how all these references are in John- as if he perceived this theme of unity through the cross.

It is likely that the Lord was crucified naked, thereby sharing the shame of Adam's nakedness. The *shame* of the cross is stressed (Heb. 11:26; 12:2; Ps. 31:17; Ps. 69:6,7,12,19,20). And we are to share those sufferings. There *must*, therefore, be an open standing up for what we believe in the eyes of a hostile world. Preaching, in this sense, is for all of us. And if we dodge this, we put the Son of God to a naked shame; we re-crucify Him naked, we shame Him again (Heb. 6:6). He was crucified naked, and the sun went in for three hours. He must have been cold, very cold (Jn. 18:18). Artemidorus Daldianus (*Oneirokritika* 2.53) confirms that the Romans usually crucified victims naked. Melito of Sardis, writing in the 2nd century, writes of "his body naked and not even deemed worthy of a clothing that it might not be seen. Therefore the heavenly lights turned away and the day darkened in order that he might be hidden who was denuded upon the cross" (*On the Pasch* 97). The earliest portrayals of the crucified Jesus, on carved gems, feature Him naked. There is reason to think that the Jews put the Lord to the maximum possible shame and pain; therefore they may well have crucified Him naked. T. Mommsen *The Digest Of Justinian* 48.20.6 reports that "the garments that the condemned person is wearing may not be demanded by the torturers"- the fact that they gambled for His clothes shows that the Lord was yet again treated illegally (quite a feature of the records) and to the maximum level of abuse. We not only get this impression from the Biblical record, but from a passage in the Wisdom of Solomon (2:12-20) which would have been well known to them, and which has a surprising number of similarities to the Lord's life amongst the Jews (7):

"Let us lie in wait for the virtuous man, since he annoys us and opposes our way of life, reproaches us for our breaches of the law and accuses us of playing false... he claims to have knowledge of God, and calls himself a son of the Lord. Before us he stands, a reproof to our way of thinking, the very sight of him weighs our spirits down; His way of life is not like other men's... in His opinion we are counterfeit...and boasts of having God as His father. let us see if what he says is true, let us observe what kind of end he himself will have. If the virtuous man is God's son, God will take his part and rescue him from the clutches of his enemies. *Let us test him with cruelty and with torture, and thus explore this gentleness of His and put His endurance to the proof. Let us condemn him to a shameful death* since he will be looked after- we have his word for it".

The idea of the Lord being subjected to the maximum pain and mocking must, sadly, be applied to Seneca's description of how some victims of crucifixion were nailed through their genitals (*Dialogi* 6.20.3). In this sense the paradox of Is. 53 would have come true- through losing His ability to bring forth children, the Lord brought forth a huge multitude of spiritual children world-wide. It's an honour to be one of them.

By casting lots- Did they throw the die on top of His outer garment? Note the focus of the soldiers upon the dividing up of the clothes, whilst the Son of God played out the ultimate

spiritual drama for human salvation just a metre or so away from them. And our pettiness is worked out all too often in sight of the same cross. As those miserable men argued over the clothes at the foot of the cross, so when Israel stood before the glory of Yahweh at Sinai, they still suffered "disputes" amongst themselves (Ex. 24:22 NIV cp. Heb. 12:29). So pressing and important do human pettinesses appear, despite the awesomeness of that bigger picture to which we stand related.

27:36 *Sitting down*- "And they sat down" after symbolically killing Joseph. "Sitting down *they* watched *him* there". Mark particularly has an abnormal number of pronouns throughout the record. The emphasis is on " he... him... his" ; also " they" occurs more than average. The contrast is being established between the crucified Christ and the world. If we are to identify with His cross, it is axiomatic that there must be a thorough separation from this world (Gal. 1:4).

Watched Him- In the sense of guarding Him, rather than simply staring at Him.

Matthew and Mark discuss the placing of the placard out of sequence, in order to emphasize how they did the Son of God to death, and then got on with splitting up His few clothes. The petty materialism of man was played out just a metre or two from the suffering Saviour, while He saw saying (repeatedly, the Greek could imply), "Father, forgive them"; with all the pain of speech which the crucified position involved. There were four soldiers, and they each took a part of His clothing: His head covering, belt, inner coat, His sandals. Those Galilean sandals, that had walked so many miles. He went about doing good, and healing... They knelt on His chest and nailed Him, slung the mallets back into their packs, and straight away got on with arguing about who was going to keep those worn out shoes. One wonders whether the soldier wore them or sold them. Or kept them. And we must look at our petty materialism in the light of the cross, reflecting on the power of mammon: to eclipse the vision of the cross, to silence men from speaking of the wonder of the resurrection (Mt. 28:14)- to entice a man to betray the Lord of all grace (Mt. 26:15 implies Judas' motivation was financial, first and foremost). Long hours, demanding hours, striving for well-paid careers... all so we can have a nice car, a house, not a flat, in a nice area, so we can wear nice fitting clothes, so we can eat food which tickles the taste buds, rather than food which gives the basic proteins and vitamins etc. We do all this. Almost all of us. At the foot of the cross. Ignoring what it really means. And even worse: we excuse ourselves rather than admit our guilt. The records of the writing of the inscriptions may also be out of place in order to create the picture of all the people sitting watching the Lord Jesus, with that title over Him. The other two were there, but the people all watched Jesus. He was lifted up, and He drew all men (all men's eyes, in the primary sense) unto Him (Jn. 12:32). And the cross has that same magnetism today.

27:37 *Set up*- This is out of sequence; the inscription was placed at the actual impalement (according to the other Gospels). Luke seems to imply that the mocking was because of this

placard; it must have been a very unusual crime to die for, contrasting sharply with the usual reasons for death which were displayed on crosses.

This is Jesus- Not only was the Lord's death ongoing during His life. It was normal to write over the crucified 'This *was*...'. But over the Lord it was written: 'This *is* Jesus', as if for all time, this was His memorial to all generations.

Did Pilate write it in his own handwriting? Did they use the same ladder to place the inscription which Joseph later used to retrieve the body? Why do the records suggest that the inscription was placed after the stake had been erected? Was there initial resistance from the Jews? Was He impaled with the placard around His neck, and then the ladder was put up, and a soldier lifted it off and nailed it above His head? "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" written in Hebrew would have used words whose first letters created the sacred Name: YHWH. Perhaps this was why there was such opposition to it. "King of the Jews" would have been understood as a Messianic title. Either Pilate was sarcastic, or really believed it, or just wanted to provoke the Jews. In any case, somehow the Yahweh Name was linked with the Messiah: King of the Jews. The Name was declared in the Lord's death, as He had foretold (Jn. 17:26). Forgiveness of sins is through baptism into the Name (Acts 2:38), as even in OT times forgiveness was for the sake of the Name (Ps. 79:9). And yet through the cross and blood of Christ is forgiveness made possible. His blood and death therefore was the supreme declaration of God's Name; through His cross the grace and forgiveness, love, salvation and judgment implicit in the Name was all enabled and revealed in practice. Ps. 22:22 prophesied that "I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the congregation [*ekklesia*, LXX]". It was to us His brethren that the Name was declared; in the eyes of an unbelieving world, this was just another crucified man, a failure, a wannabe who never made it. But to us, it is the declaration of the Name. It was and is done in the midst of the *ekklesia*, as if the whole church from that day to this beholds it all at first hand. And our response is to in turn "Declare His righteousness" (Ps. 22:31), in response to seeing the Name declared, we declare to Him...in lives of love for the brethren. For the Name was declared, that the love that was between the Father and Son might be in us.

Ps. 40:9,10 speaks of how the Lord Jesus would proclaim righteousness to the *ekklesia* and declare God's faithfulness and salvation, i.e. the things of His Name. Yet this passage is quoted in Heb. 10:5-7 about the cross. It was there above all that "thy law is within my heart" and He "preached righteousness". This is why Paul can talk of "the preaching [which is] the cross". He as He was there is the ultimate witness. And this was why the Yahweh Name was written up over Him.

Note that Lk. 22:36,38 record that the inscription on the cross was "also" written- connecting with how the soldiers "also" mocked Him. The inscription was intended as another mockery; but

it was a vital part in declaring God's glory. The incident is typical of how those things which seem the most negative and unspiritual are used by the Father to His and our glory in the end.

27:38 Mt. 27:38 RV has a dramatic change of tense: "Then are there crucified with him...". Mark's present tenses are also arresting: "plaiting... they clothe him... they smote..." (:17,19 RV). Perhaps Mark is seeking consciously to make us imagine it all as going on before our eyes. Take just Mk. 15:23-26: "They offered... they crucify... and part... casting lots... crucified... was written". These arresting changes are surely to encourage us to re-live it all. Mark speaks of "they crucify him", going on to say that "then are there two crucified with him" (Mk. 15:38 RV), whereas Luke records the act in the past tense. Significantly, very few actual details are given by the Gospel writers of both the scourging and the crucifixion. It could be that they felt it impossible to dwell upon these things; or it could be that they and their readers knew what was involved in these practices, and we are left to dwell upon them in our own imagination. We are intended to reconstruct in our own minds what may have happened... We have a solemn duty towards Him to do this. This is perhaps why the tenses change so dramatically in the records.

Two robbers- The crucified Christ is portrayed as King of criminals, King of the basest sort, enthroned between them, taking the place of their leader Barabbas, who ought to have been where the Lord was. Both Barabbas and the thieves are described with the same Greek word, translated "robber" (Jn. 18:40; Mk. 15:27). The Lord uses the same word when He points out that His persecutors were treating him as a "robber" (Mt. 26:55; Mk. 14:48; Lk. 22:52); He seems to be aware that what the experience He is going through is setting up Barabbas as a kind of inverse type of Himself, the true 'Son of the Father' (= 'Barabbas'). Those low, desperate men, the dregs of society, were types of us. Barabbas especially becomes a symbol of us all. According to Jewish tradition at the time (*Pesach* 8.6) "They may slaughter the Passover lamb... for one whom they [the authorities] have promised to release from prison". The Passover amnesty freed a man justly condemned to death- on account of the death of the lamb. We can imagine the relief and joy and almost unbelief of Barabbas, as he watched or reflected upon the crucifixion of Jesus- that he who rightfully should have been there on the cross, was delivered from such a death because of the cross of Christ. The image of condemned prisoners being released due to the death of Messiah is an undoubted Old Testament figure for our redemption from slavery. Some of the legal terms used in the NT for our redemption imply that Christ redeemed us from slavery through His death. And yet one could redeem a slave by oneself becoming a slave (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23; Gal. 3:13; 4:5). This is why the crucified Jesus is typified by the suffering servant / slave of Isaiah's prophecies. And Paul seems to have risen up to something similar when he speaks of giving his body to be branded, i.e. becoming a slave (1 Cor. 13:3 Gk.).

27:39 *They that passed by-* The idea of crucifixion was that it was public. The invitation to carry the Lord's cross is an invitation to likewise be public and open in our identification with Him.

But these people repeated the false accusation raised in the Sanhedrin trial, that the Lord had planned to destroy the temple (:40). One wonders, therefore, whether these people were indeed passers by. To have access to that information means they may have been close to the Jewish leadership. Perhaps they simply made out that they were 'passers by', and the Biblical record is at times written from the standpoint of how things appear to men, even if that is not the actual case [consider the language of demons]. Or it could be that these people continually passed back and forth in front of the Lord in order to try to provoke Him repeatedly with their blasphemy.

“Those that passed by” were not only comprised of casual passers-by who thought “Hey, there's a crucifixion, let's go and have a look”. Golgotha was a little way out of the city. The size of the crowd must have been considerable; “crowds came to the spectacle” (Lk. 23:48 Gk.). It seems more reasonable that the reference is to those who passed by, back and forth (the Greek could imply), 'passing along' (Mk. 15:29) in front of the cross, taunting the Lord, as if they were making a wave offering in front of the presence of God in the crucified Christ. The connection between Ps. 22:7 and Mt. 27:39 would suggest that these 'passers-by' were there with the express intent of taunting Him. Because His eyes were inevitably downward, it would have been difficult for the Lord not to look at them. Their words were exactly those of the Sanhedrin (Mt. 26:61), so presumably they came from there- the work colleagues of Joseph and Nicodemus.

Derided Him- The reproach broke the Lord's heart (Ps. 69:20). It could even be that He suffered a heart rupture, a literal broken heart, some hours prior to His death- hence when His side was pierced, blood flowed out- and corpses don't usually bleed. It has been commented that severe emotional trauma is enough to cause such a rupture. He wasn't hard and impervious to it all. He knew who He was, and where He was going. To be treated as He was, was such an insult to the God of all grace. And He keenly sensed this. Heb. 12:2,3 parallels the Lord's enduring of the cross with His enduring “such contradiction of sinners against Himself”. These mockings were therefore part of “the cross”. The “cross” process began before His impalement; in the same way as some verses which evidently concern the crucifixion are applied to the Lord's earlier life. His was *a life* of cross carrying. And we are asked to live the same life, not just the occasional 'cross' of crisis, but a life embodying the cross principles. As “the cross” means more than the impalement which epitomized it, likewise “the blood of Christ” means far more than the red liquid. These concepts found their physical epitome in the crucifixion process, but there is so much more to these things than the physical. The blood of the covenant, the Son of God and the Spirit of grace are bracketed together in Heb. 10:29. The Lord *was* His blood. The pouring out of blood from His side, the trickles down His cheeks from the crown of thorns, quickly drying in the hot dust beneath... this was *Him*. We take the wine in memory of *Him*; not just His blood. And He *is* the Spirit of God's grace. By Himself He purged our sins (Heb. 1:3); and yet this purging was through His blood (Heb. 9:14). He was His blood; His cross was the essence of all He was.

27:40 *You that would destroy the temple*- This would have reminded Him that He was doing this to Himself, they weren't doing it to Him. He knew that the temple would be ripped apart stone by stone. And so He knew the temple of His body must be, for in that body He bore our sins on the tree. He had foretold that the tabernacle of His body would be 'taken down' as that in the wilderness was, taken apart piece by piece. In that lengthy procedure He had seen foretold the excruciating nature of His death, as every aspect of humanity was taken apart. "...and buildest it in three days" would have taken His mind forward to that certain future. So their taunt would have aided His efforts to remain spiritual. Likewise their allusions to Ps. 22 ("He trusted in God...") served to steer the Lord's mind there, and to take comfort from the rest of the Psalm and the context of their mocking quotations. Yet even in the mocking, the Lord's Bible mind would have found some sort of encouragement. For the Lord was so clearly bearing the judgment of Israel's sins: "All who pass along the way clap their hands at you: they hiss and wag their heads at the daughter of Jerusalem" (Lam. 2:15). And note too Jer. 48:27 (LXX 31:27): "Is Israel a laughing stock? Was she caught between thieves that you wag your head?". This is exactly the Lord's position, between thieves, and mocked- but by Israel. These prophecies imply it was the Gentiles who would mock Israel; thus by treating the Lord as they did, they declared themselves to be no longer God's people but Gentiles. The darkness that came down would have recalled Jer. 33:19-21- when day and night no longer follow their normal sequence, God is breaking His covenant. Israel's condemnation would be that "even at midday you will grope like a blind man in the dark" (Dt. 28:29). And yet the Lord would have known that He was suffering for Israel, treated as an apostate Israel, and thus He was the more inspired to pray for their ultimate forgiveness and salvation, seeing He had borne their condemnation. The Lord suffered "for the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke was due" (Is. 53:8 RVmg.). There are therefore elements of the crucifixion sufferings of Jesus in every suffering of natural Israel.

Save Yourself- All the emphasis on save *yourself* was a temptation for Him to forget *us*. He would have reflected that He was saving Himself and us by staying where He was; coming down from the cross wouldn't lead to salvation. What the flesh understands by salvation and what the spirit understands by it are vastly different.

Come down from the cross- A repeat of the wilderness temptation to come down from the temple pinnacle. This temptation was at the hands of the Jews, and there is every reason to think that the wilderness temptations likewise were somehow involved with the Jewish satan. The Lord had likened His death on the cross, His giving of His flesh for the life of the world, to the coming down of manna from Heaven (Jn. 6:50,51,58). 'Coming down' was the classic language of theophany and God manifestation; the Lord's ascension was on the very basis that He had indeed 'come down' (Eph. 4:10). And He was indeed 'coming down', not a mere meter or so from the stake to the ground, but from Heaven to earth- for their salvation. Time and again the situations associated with the Lord's suffering were full of reference to His earlier teachings and beliefs. He was thus confirmed by the hand of providence in the path He had taken, realizing that this was

not at all 'bad luck' or a suffering to simply be endured, but rather every detail of it was under God's hand controlled to confirm Him in His path to glory.

“Come down from the cross” was a repeat of the second temptation: Come down from the temple tower; throw yourself to death in Gehenna below, and perhaps the Angels will even then save you. This had been a temptation to commit suicide, to give up life without giving it for His friends, and hope that somehow the Angels would save Him personally. Victory in one temptation leads to victory again and again. All the wilderness temptations recurred during the crucifixion. Notice how the three temptations of Jesus in the desert are repeated in the three mockeries of Him on the cross recorded in Matthew and Luke. The comment that the devil departed from Him “for a season” may imply ‘he’ returned at the cross. And clearly enough, the temptations at the end were internal, even if voiced by an external person.

27:41 Mocking Him- Matthew and Mark record the same incident. The priests said among themselves (Mk.); Matthew implies they said it to Him. They spoke in mock whispers, huddled in their group, but loud enough for Him to hear.

The elders- Many of whom believed in Him (Jn. 12:42), but were led to this awful behaviour by the need to keep up appearances and the fear of exclusion from the synagogue.

27:42 He saved others- A tacit recognition that His healing miracles and the resurrection of Lazarus were undeniable. “He saved others” would have been a reference to Lazarus. His was a well-known case among the Jews (was Lazarus there? It would have been strange if He had not been). The Lord's mind would have choked at the memory of dear Lazarus, Martha, Mary, the now shattered family whom He had loved and still loved.

If He is the King of Israel- RV “He is the King of Israel...” - His claims to Kingship, and the claim of His placard, was a repeated jibe. It must have seemed so incongruous that this wretchedly suffering man actually thought Himself to be a King. “If... let him come down” may have been followed by a pause: is He going to do anything? In their hearts they must have known that He had had the ability to pull off this kind of thing. Those silent pauses must have been an agony for the Lord. There were probably many in that crowd half sympathetic to His wretched cause, who, on the surface, really might have believed if He had come down. But He had learned

the lesson in the Galilee days, that impressive miracles didn't really instill faith (Pentecostals etc. still fail to realize this).

The mocking Jews fall strangely silent in the crucifixion accounts. The Lord had plainly foretold that when they had lifted up the Son of man, then they would know "that I am he", and would recognize His Divine Sonship (Jn. 8:27). There was something about the vision of Christ crucified which convicted them of their folly and of the Divinity of God's Son. And that power burns on today.

27:43 He trusted in God- As in :42 "He saved others", a tacit recognition that He had indeed trusted in God.

Let Him deliver Him- Perhaps mocking the Lord's model prayer, "Deliver us from evil". If so, this is an indication of how well known the Lord's teachings had become. Even the elders knew the content of His model prayer.

If He desires Him- They were alluding to the LXX of Ps. 18:19 and 91:11. God cannot be tempted, otherwise He would have responded. 'If God *likes* Him', is what they were really implying.

For He said: I am the Son of God- The Lord is never recorded as actually saying that in so many words. He preferred to leave His works and character to show that fact. And these learned men showed ignorance of the most basic Bible teaching- that God does not immediately deliver His children from their crises, nor does His apparent silence mean that He does not love them.

27:44 Cast upon Him the same reproach- The same word is used of how these reproaches were actually against God, but they as it were fell upon the Lord (Rom. 15:3). In this we see the intensity of God's manifestation in his crucified Son. Paul quotes this in the context of appealing for our patience with the weak, knowing we are living out the spirit of the crucified Christ in our patient bearing with them (Rom. 15:1). Perhaps Paul specifically has in mind how the Lord was patient with the thieves, the weak, who reproached Him; and that patience paid off, in that one of them was converted to such an extent that he was assured of final salvation.

The intellectuals in concentration camps were often mocked and hated by the other inmates until they came down to their level. It is, apparently, an almost natural reaction. It explains another concentration camp phenomenon- that victims often cooperate with their persecutors in crimes against other victims; the weak join with the strong to persecute others who are weak. This, on a psychological level, helps to explain why the later-repentant thief should speak like this. And yet

the Lord bore with him, and His patience led to the man's conversion and salvation. They were men at the very limit of human experience. The self-respect of Jesus would have been most unusual; the purpose of the crucifixion process was to drive this out. He knew Who He was, and where He was going. Josephus describes how those on trial with the threat of crucifixion hanging over them did all that they could to appeal for mercy. The thieves probably did this. This is why the Jews were so scandalized when the Lord refused to answer for Himself, and then calmly stated that He was the Messiah who would come to them in judgment at the last day (Mt. 26:64,65); He was speaking the very blasphemy which they were trying so unsuccessfully to convict Him of. We can be sure that they and the soldiers tried especially hard to drive the self-respect from Him: which in His case would have meant resigning His belief that He was the spotless Son of God. This would explain why the soldiers mocked Him as they did, and why the onlooking Jews did so: unconsciously, they wanted to bring Him down to their level. The fact the Lord didn't descend to their level is yet another mark of the extent of His victory. It was the same temptation as 'Come down from the cross'; 'Come down to our level, the level of desperate men, just concentrating on hanging here and shifting the weight around between hands and feet, hands and feet, hands and feet...'. You know how it is when you are carrying a very heavy load. You just concentrate on carrying it. You pant and sweat and don't care if you bump into somebody or tread on a child's toy. Those men were on that level. The Lord was in the same physical situation, but somehow He rose above, He didn't descend to the animal, mindless level. Thank you, Lord, that for *my* sake You didn't.

27:45 *Sixth hour... ninth hour*- The only other Biblical reference to the sixth and ninth hours together is again in Matthew, and again on the lips of the Lord. It is when He spoke of how the householder went out at the sixth and ninth hours to desperately appeal for labourers to come and work for Him (20:5). This connection surely cannot be so arbitrary. The Lord intended that each waypoint or landmark in the crucifixion process would be an appeal to us to break out of our lethargy and come forward and serve Him in practice.

Darkness- Darkness is often associated in the OT with mourning. Am. 8:9,10 speaks of earthquake and darkness at noon because "I will make it as the mourning for an only son, and the end thereof as a bitter day", i.e. a funeral. The darkness was a sign of *Almighty God mourning for His Son*.

27:47 *This man calls Elijah*- They were confusing "Eliyahu" with "Eloi, Eloi". With teeth loose or missing, throat parched from the fever induced by the iron nails in the blood stream, the difficulty of speaking because of being suspended by the arms...this confusion isn't surprising.

Digression 39: The Reality of Crucifixion

The sheer and utter reality of the crucifixion needs to be meditated upon just as much as the actual reality of the fact that Jesus actually existed. A Psalm foretold that Jesus at His death would be the song of the drunkards. Many Nazi exterminators took to drink. And it would seem almost inevitable that the soldiers who crucified Jesus went out drinking afterwards. Ernest Hemingway wrote a chilling fictional story of how those men went into a tavern late on that Friday evening. After drunkenly debating whether "Today is Friday", they decide that it really is Friday, and then tell how they nailed Him and lifted Him up. "When the weight starts to pull on 'em, that's when it gets em... Ain't I seen em ? I seen plenty of 'em . I tell you, he was pretty good today". And that last phrase runs like a refrain through their drunken evening. Whether or not this is an accurate reconstruction isn't my point- we have a serious duty to seek to imagine what it might have been like. Both Nazi and Soviet executioners admit how vital it was to never look the man you were murdering in the face. It was why they put on a roughness which covered their real personalities. And the Lord's executioners would have done the same. To look into His face, especially His eyes, dark with love and grief for His people, would have driven those men to either suicide or conversion. I imagine them stealing a look at His face, the face of this man who didn't struggle with them but willingly laid Himself down on the wood. The cross struck an educated Greek as barbaric folly, a Roman citizen as sheer disgrace, and a Jew as God's curse. Yet Jesus turned the sign of disgrace into a sign of victory. Through it, He announced a radical revaluation of all values. He made it a symbol for a brave life, without fear even in the face of fatal risks; through struggle, suffering, death, in firm trust and hope in the goal of true freedom, life, humanity, eternal life. The offence, the sheer scandal, was turned into an amazing experience of salvation, the way of the cross into a possible way of life. The risen Christ was and is just as much a living reality. Suetonius records that Claudius expelled Jewish Christians from Rome because they were agitated by one Chrestus; i.e. Jesus the Christ. Yet the historian speaks as if He was actually alive and actively present in person . In essence, He was. All the volumes of confused theology, the senseless theories about the Trinity. would all have been avoided if only men had had the faith to believe that the man Jesus who really died and rose, both never sinned and was also indeed the Son of God. And that His achievement of perfection in human flesh was real. Yes it takes faith- and all the wrong theology was only an excuse for a lack of such faith.

Several crucifixion victims have been unearthed. One was nailed with nails 18c.m. long (7 inches). A piece of acacia wood seems to have been inserted between the nail head and the flesh. *Did the Lord cry out in initial pain and shock?* Probably, as far as I can reconstruct it; for He would have had all the physical reflex reactions of any man. But yet I also sense that He didn't flinch as other men did. He came to offer His life, willingly; not grudgingly, resistantly give it up. He went through the panic of approaching the pain threshold. The nailing of the hands and feet just where the nerves were would have sent bolts of pain through the Lord's arms every time He moved or spoke. The pain would have been such that even with the eyelids closed, a penetrating red glare would have throbbled in the Lord's vision. Hence the value and intensity of those words He did speak. The pulling up on the nails in the hands as the cross was lifted up would have been excruciating. The hands were nailed through the 'Destot gap', between the first

and second row of wrist bones, touching an extra sensitive nerve which controls the movement of the thumb and signals receipt of pain. They would not have been nailed through the palms or the body would not have been supportable . It has been reconstructed that in order to breathe, the crucified would have had to pull up on his hands, lift the head for a breath, and then let the head subside. The sheer physical agony of it all cannot be minimized. Zenon Ziolkowski (*Spor O Calun*) discusses contemporary descriptions of the faces of the crucified, including Jehohanan the Zealot, whose crucifixion Josephus mentions. Their faces were renowned for being terribly distorted by pain. The Lord's face was marred more than that of any other, so much so that those who saw Him looked away (Is. 52:14). That prophecy may suggest that for the Lord, the crucifixion process hurt even more. We suggest later that He purposefully refused to take relief from pushing down on the 'seat', and thus died more painfully and quicker. Several of the unearthed victims were crucified on olive trees. So it was perhaps an olive tree which the Lord had to carry. He would have thought of this as He prayed among the olive trees of Gethsemane (perhaps they took it from that garden?). I would not have gone through with this. I would have chosen a lesser death and the achieving of a lesser salvation. I would have had more pity on myself. But the Lord of all did it *for me*, He became obedient *even* to death on a cross (Phil. 2:8), as if He could have been obedient to a lesser death, but He chose this ultimately high level. I can only marvel at the Father's gentleness with us, that despite the ineffable trauma of death, the way He takes us is so much more gentle than how He allowed His only begotten to go.

Presumably there were many soldiers around. The temple guard which was seconded to the Jews (Mt. 27:65) was doubtless there in full force, lest there be any attempt to save Jesus by the crowd or the disciples. And yet Jn. 19:23 suggests there were only four soldiers, each of whom received a part of His clothing. This must mean that there were four actually involved in the crucifixion: one for each hand and foot. He had signs of nails (plural) in His hands. We are left to meditate as to whether He was nailed hand over hand as tradition has it (which would have meant two very long nails were used); or both hands separately.

Despite much prior meditation, there perhaps dawned on the Lord some 'physical' realizations as to the nature of His crucified position: the utter impossibility of making the slightest change of position, especially when tormented by flies, the fact that the hands and feet had been pierced in the most sensitive areas; the fact that the arms were arranged in such a way so that the weight of the body hung only on the muscles, not on the bones and tendons. The smell of blood would have brought forth yelping dogs, circling birds of prey, flying insects...an incessant barrage of annoyances, things to distract the Lord's mind. As we too also face. He would have realized that the whole process was designed to produce tension in every part of the body. All His body, every part of it, in every aspect, had to suffer (and He would have realized the significance of this, and seen *all* of us as suffering with Him). The muscles were all hopelessly overworked, cramps due to the malcirculation of blood would have created an overwhelming desire to move. All victims would have writhed and wriggled within the few millimetres leeway which they had, to avoid a splinter pushing into the back lacerated from flogging... But my sense is that the Lord somehow didn't do this. He didn't push down on the footrests for relief (see 54), He didn't take the pain killer, He didn't ask for a drink until the end, when presumably the others accepted. Every muscle in the body would have become locked after two hours or so. Every part of His body

suffered, symbolic of how through His sufferings He was able to identify with every member of His spiritual body- for "we are members of his body, of his flesh and of his bones" (Eph. 5:30). He had perhaps foreseen something of all this when He likened the killing of His body to the taking down of a tent / tabernacle- every bone and sinew, like every pole and canvass, had to be uprooted, 'taken down' (Jn. 2:19,21).

The moment of lifting the stake up vertical, probably amidst a renewed surge of abuse or cheering from the crowd, had been long foreseen and imagined by the Lord. " If, if I be *lifted up*..." (Jn. 12:32). He foresaw the physical (and spiritual) details of the crucifixion process in such detail. Recall how He foresaw that moment of handing over to death. And yet still He asked for the cup to pass, still He panicked and felt forsaken. If the theory of the cross was so hard to actually live out in practice for the Lord, then how hard it must be for us. The Lord's descriptions of Himself as being 'lifted up' use a phrase which carried in Hebrew the idea of exaltation and glory. As He was lifted up physically, the ground swaying before His eyes, His mind fixed upon the Father and the forgiveness which He was making possible through His sacrifice, covered in blood and spittle, struggling for breath... He was 'lifted up' in glory and exaltation, to those who have open eyes to see and hearts to imagine and brains to comprehend.

Imagine yourself being crucified. Go through the stages in the process. The Lord invited us to do this when He asked us to figuratively crucify ourselves daily. Consider all the language of the sacrifices which pointed forward to the final, supreme act of the Lord: poured out, pierced, parted in pieces, beaten out; the rock smitten... and this is the process which we are going through, although the Father deals with us infinitely more gently than with His only Son.

It is one of the greatest internal proofs of inspiration that this climactic act is recorded by each of the Gospel writers as a participial or subordinate clause. The concentration is on the splitting up of the clothes, which happened, of course, after the impaling. It is as if the record at this point is from the perspective of the soldiers. Get the job done, and *then*, on with the important bit!- the dividing of the clothes! No human author would ever have written like this. It's rather like the way Mary thinks that the risen Lord is a gardener. There is something artless and utterly Divine about it all. The record is full of what I would call spiritual culture. It has the hallmark of the Divine. This may be why some of the 'obvious' fulfilments of prophecy aren't mentioned, e.g. Is. 53:7 concerning the Lamb dumb before her shearers. Likewise there is no record of the faithful women weeping, or moaning as the body was taken down.

"Why hast thou forsaken me?"

The Greek seems to mean "Why *didst thou* forsake me", perhaps implying that He had already overcome the feeling of being forsaken. Mark records "Eloi"; Matthew "Eli". Why? There *is* a difference. Did He say "Eli, Eli, Eloi, Eloi" ? Four times calling upon God? We are going to suggest that these words indicate a crisis in the mind of the Lord Jesus. We would wish to write in almost every sentence of this study that the Lord Jesus was utterly sinless. Yet as one tempted to the limit, He must have come close to the edge. One of the superlative marvels of the Lord in His death was the way He never seems to have lost His spiritual composure, despite every

physical and mental assault. Yet in these words we have Him perhaps nearer to such a breakdown of composure than anywhere else. Another example of His being 'close to the edge' was when He was in the Garden, asking for the cup to be taken away from Him. Compare those words with His clear understanding that He would have to die on a cross and later be resurrected. The clarity of His understanding is to be marvelled at. He went to the cross "knowing all things that should come upon him" (Jn. 18:4). He not only foresaw His death by crucifixion and subsequent resurrection, but many other details besides. Thus He spoke of how He was like a seed which would be buried in a *garden* (as He was) and then rise again (Lk. 13:19). But compare all this with His plea for another way to be found in Gethsemane, and also the cry "Why hast thou forsaken me?". There is only one realistic conclusion from this comparison: those words indicate a faltering in the Lord Jesus, a blip on the screen, a wavering in purpose. One marvels that there were not more such occasions recorded.

The first blip on the screen was in Gethsemane. The second one was when He cried "Why hast thou forsaken me?". We should remind ourselves of the chronology of events around the crucifixion (1):

14th Nissan	9p.m.	Last Supper
12p.m.	Arrest	
9a.m. (" the third hour")	Crucifixion	
12a.m. - 3p.m. (" sixth to the ninth hour")	Darkness	
3p.m. (" the ninth hour")	Death; Passover lambs killed	
15th Nissan	9p.m.	Israel eat Passover
16th Nissan	6p.m.	Passover Sabbath ends
5a.m.	Resurrection?	
6a.m.	Women at the tomb	
3p.m.	Walk to Emmaus	

The fact is, Christ died "at the ninth hour". It was at the ninth hour that he cried "It is finished" and "Father into thy hands I commend my spirit". Yet it was also *at* the ninth hour that He said "My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mk. 15:34). The conclusion is that *at the very last moment* our Lord faltered. It was 11:59, and He faltered. Enter, *please*, into the sense of crisis and intensity. This is the only time that he prays to God as "God" rather than "Father" / *abba*. This itself reflects the sense of distance that enveloped Him. For He was your Lord and your Saviour hanging there, it was your salvation which hung in the balance. There is a very telling point to be made from Mt. 27:46. There we read that at "*about* the ninth hour, Jesus cried" those words about being forsaken. Mark says it was at the ninth hour, and we know it was at the ninth hour that Christ uttered His final words of victory. Yet it must have been only a few minutes before the ninth hour when Christ faltered; hence Matthew says that it was "*about* the ninth hour". What is a few minutes? Only a few hundred seconds, only moments. Only moments before the sweetness of the final victory, "It is finished" or accomplished, the Son of God was faltering. The more we appreciate this wavering at the last minute, the more fully we will appreciate the power and sense of victory behind Christ's final two sayings on the cross, uttered only moments later.

And so we come to the crux of the problem. How and why was Christ forsaken by the Father? Ultimately, of course, the Father did not forsake the Son in His time of greatest need and agony. I would suggest that Christ only *felt* forsaken; although if you *feel* forsaken, in a sense you are forsaken. The prototype of Christ feeling forsaken was in David feeling forsaken by God when he fled from Absalom (Ps. 42:9; 43:2; 88:14); but clearly he was not actually forsaken. But *why* did our Lord falter like this, at 11:59, one minute to twelve, at this agonizing last moment? Seeing the Father did not forsake the Son, there seems to have been some kind of intellectual failure in the Lord's reasoning. In the terrible circumstances in which He was, this is hardly surprising. Yet such genuine intellectual failure, a real, unpretended failure to correctly understand something, usually has a psychological basis. The Lord, it seems to me, *feared death more than any other man*. He knew that death was separation from God, the wages of sin. Different people have varying degrees of fear of death (e.g. the unrepentant thief was totally resigned to it). It would seem that the Lord had the highest conceivable level of unresignation to death, to the point of being almost paranoid about it- even though He knew He must die. Two prototypes of the Lord had similar experiences. Abraham suffered "an horror of great darkness" (Gen. 15:12), in an event rich in reference to the crucifixion. And Job's sufferings were the very things which he "greatly feared" (Job 3:25). The Lord stood as a lamb dumb before His shearers; and the lamb is struck dumb with fear. This all makes the Lord's death *for us* so much the more awesome.

Desire for Deliverance?

We have elsewhere commented concerning the possibility that Christ felt that although He would be tied to the cross as Isaac was, yet somehow He would be delivered. Gen. 22:22 LXX speaks of Abraham not withholding his son- and the same word is found in Rom. 8:32 about God 'not sparing' His own son. Clearly the offering of Isaac is to be understood as prophetic of the Lord's sacrifice. The Lord's growing realization that the entangled ram represented Him rather than Isaac would have led to this sense of panic which He now expressed. There is more evidence than we sometimes care to consider that Christ's understanding was indeed limited; He was capable of misunderstanding Scripture, especially under the stress of the cross. Earlier, in the garden, He had panicked; He was "sore amazed" (Mk. 14:33, s.w. "greatly wondering", Acts 3:11).

This desire for personal deliverance from the cross would have been there within our Lord throughout the six hours He hung there. And yet His only other earlier utterances which are recorded are all concerned with the welfare of others; us, the Jews, the thief, His mother. He supremely mastered His own flare of panic and desire for His personal salvation and relief, subjecting it to His spiritual and practical concern for others.

Defining Forsaking

A study of Psalm 22 indicates deeper reasons why Christ felt forsaken. He had been crying out loud for deliverance, presumably for some time, according to Ps. 22:1-6, both during and before the unnatural three hour darkness. He felt that His desire for deliverance was not being heard, although the prayers of others had been heard in the past when they cried with a like intensity. The Lord Jesus was well aware of the connection between God's refusal to answer prayer and

His recognition of sin in the person praying (2 Sam. 22:42 = Ps. 2:2-5). It is emphasized time and again that God will not forsake those who love Him (e.g. Dt. 4:31; 31:6; 1 Sam. 12:22; 1 Kings 6:13; Ps. 94:14; Is. 41:17; 42:16). Every one of these passages must have been well known to our Lord, the word made flesh. He knew that God forsaking Israel was a punishment for their sin (Jud. 6:13; 2 Kings 21:14; Is. 2:6; Jer. 23:33). God would forsake Israel only if they forsook Him (Dt. 31:16,17; 2 Chron. 15:2). It may be helpful to summarize the two strands of Bible teaching concerning being forsaken:

God will not forsake His people if they are righteous

"When thou art in tribulation... and shalt be obedient unto his voice... he will not forsake thee" (Dt. 4:18,19)

"The Lord thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee" (Dt. 31:6)

"The Lord will not forsake His people for his great name's sake: because it hath pleased the Lord to make you his people" (1 Sam. 12:22)

"If thou wilt walk in my statutes... and keep all my commandments to walk in them... I will not forsake my people" (1 Kings 6:12,13)

"Blessed is the man (Messiah) whom thou chastenest... for the Lord will not cast off his people, neither forsake his inheritance... all the upright in heart" (Ps. 94:12-15)

"When the poor and needy seek water... I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them" (Is. 41:17); i.e. God not forsaking was shown in His answering of prayer (cp. Ps. 22:1-11).

God will forsake His people if they sin

"Now the Lord hath forsaken us" because of Israel's disobedience at the time of the Judges (Jud. 6:9,13)

"Because Mannaseh hath done these abominations... I will forsake the remnant of mine inheritance, and deliver them into the hand of their enemies" (2 Kings 21:14)

"Therefore thou hast forsaken thy people... because they be replenished from the east, and are soothsayers and they please themselves" (Is. 2:6)

"I am against the (false) prophets... (therefore) I will even forsake you" (Jer. 23:33)

"If ye seek him, he will be found of you; but ye forsake him, he will forsake you" (2 Chron. 15:2)

"This people will rise up, and go a whoring after the gods of the land... and will forsake me... then my anger shall be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them" (Dt. 31:16,17)

Knowing all this, He cried out: "*Why* hast Thou forsaken me?". He felt forsaken by God, and Biblically, without a doubt, being forsaken by God means you are a sinner. "*Why* (oh *why*) hast Thou forsaken me?" is surely the Lord Jesus searching His conscience with desperate intensity, finding nothing wrong, and crying to God to show Him where He had failed, why the Father had forsaken Him. It may be that initially He assumed He had sinned (Ps. 69:5), going through the self-doubt which David went through at the time of Absalom's rebellion (Ps. 3:2). As David had felt then that God had cast him off, even though "My lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail", so the Lord felt (Ps. 89:33,38). But then with an unsurpassedly rigorous self-examination, He came to know that He really hadn't. This means that once over the crisis, our Lord died with a purity of conscience known by no other being, with a profound sense of His own totality of righteousness. Again, this enables us to better enter into the intensity of "*It is finished*".

Bearing Israel's Sins

The Lord understood His death as drinking a cup from God. But that cup was, in Old Testament language, the cup of God's wrath against a disobedient people. The Lord knew that His death was a bearing of their judgment- which is not to say, of course, that the Lord's murderers, as any sinners, have to also answer for their sins. He so wished to gather the "chicks" of Jerusalem under His wings, but they would not, and thus the house of the temple would be left desolate. The image seems to be of a farmyard hen in a fire, gathering the chicks under wings as the house burnt down, so that afterwards, beneath her charred and destroyed body, her brood would be found alive. The Lord so wished the burnt offering of the cross to result in the salvation of the Israel of His day- but they would not. This was His level of love for those who baited Him, irritated Him, dogged His every step.

Christ knew from Isaiah 53 that He was to bear Israel's sins, that the judgments for their sins were to fall upon Him. Israel 'bore their iniquities' by being condemned for them (Num. 14:34,35; Lev. 5:17; 20:17); to be a sin bearer was therefore to be one condemned. To die in punishment for your sin was to bear you sin. There is a difference between sin, and sin being laid upon a person. Num. 12:11 brings this out: "Lay not the sin upon us... wherein we have sinned". The idea of sin being laid upon a person therefore refers to condemnation for sin. Our sin being laid upon Jesus therefore means that He was treated *as if* He were a condemned sinner. He briefly endured within Him the torment of soul which the condemned will feel. It seems that even our Lord did not appreciate the extent to which He would be identified with sinful Israel, the extent to which He would have our sins imputed to Him, the weight of them, the degree to which He would be made sin for us, although knowing no sin (2 Cor. 5:21). And if He found this hard to come to terms with, no wonder we do too. The fact that the judgment for sin is sometimes equated with the sin itself was doubtless appreciated by the Lord (cp. 2 Kings 15:23); but the extent of this principle was what seemed to have been unappreciated by Him until the cross. Likewise, He would have meditated upon the way righteous men had taken upon themselves the sins of their people. Thus Jeremiah speaks as if he has committed Israel's sins; Ezra rends his clothes and plucks off his hair, as if *he* has married out of the Faith (Ezra 9:4 cp. Neh. 13:25; the Lord received the same sinner's treatment, Is. 50:6). Moses' prayer for God to relent and let him enter the land was only rejected for the sake of his association with Israel's sins (Dt.

3:26). But the *extent* to which the Lord would bear our sins was perhaps unforeseen by Him. And indeed, through His sin-bearing and sin-feeling, He enabled God Himself to know something of it too, as a Father learns and feels through a son. Thus God is likened to a man who goes away into a far country (Mt. 21:33)- the very words used by the Lord to describe how the sinner goes into a far country in his departure from the Father (Lk. 15:13). "My servant" was both Israel and the Lord Jesus; He was their representative in His sufferings. Which may well explain why in an exhibition of prisoners art from the Auschwitz death camp, there were so many crucifixes and 'stages of the cross' drawn by Jews, even in the wood of the huts, etched with their finger nails. They saw then, and will see again, the extent to which Jesus of Nazareth, through His cross, identifies with the suffering servant of Israel. Isaiah brings this point out Biblically- early in his prophecy he speaks of how "my servant" Israel will be wounded, bruised, tormented with "fresh stripes" (Is. 1:6 RVmg)- exactly the language Isaiah later uses about the sufferings of the Lord Jesus in His death.

Christ died to save Israel rather than everyone in the Gentile world (Is. 49:5; 53:8; Gal. 4:4,5), He was "a servant to the circumcised" (Rom. 15:8), "the consolation of *Israel*", unto *them* was born a saviour (Lk. 2:11,25), and therefore He had to be exactly representative of them. For this reason it was theologically necessary for Jesus to be Jewish in order to achieve the work He did. We are only saved by reason of becoming in Christ and therefore part of the Israel of God (Gal. 3:27-29). The Jewish basis of salvation is absolutely fundamental to a correct understanding of the Gospel. Consider the following evidence that fundamentally, Christ died to save Israel:

"For unto us (Israel) a child is born, unto us a son is given" (Is. 9:6)

"The Lord formed me in the womb to be His servant, to bring Jacob again to Him" (Is. 49:5)

"For the transgression of my people was he stricken" (Is. 53:8)

"God sent forth his son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law" (Gal. 4:4,5)

The good news of Christ's birth was for "all the people" of Israel, primarily (Lk. 2:10 RV).

The Lord laid down His life "for the sheep" of Israel (Jn. 10:15,16).

Both Peter and Paul appealed to the Jews to repent because it was for them that Christ had died: "Ye are the children...of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying.... And in thy seed shall all the kindreds (tribes) of the earth (land) be blessed. Unto you first (i.e. most importantly) God, having raised up his son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities... God raised unto Israel a Saviour... men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham... to you is the word of this salvation sent... we declare unto you glad tidings (the Gospel), how that the promise (of salvation in Christ) which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children" (Acts 3:25,26; 13:23,26,32,33).

"For I say that Christ has become a servant to the circumcision (Rom. 15:17) has reference to Isaiah's Servant prophecies of the crucifixion. But it is also, as so often in Paul, a reference to the Lord's words; in this case, Mt. 20.26-28: "It is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did

not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many". The 'becoming a servant' refers to His death; and He became a servant, Paul says, to the Jews above all.

Our Representative

Because of all this, the sufferings of Christ on the cross have connections with the punishments for Israel's sins (e.g. being offered gall to drink = Jer. 8:14; Lam. 3:5). Israel were temporarily forsaken by God because of their sins (Is. 49:14; 54:7), and therefore so was Christ. Christ was chastened with the rod of men "and with the stripes of the children of men", i.e. Israel (Is. 53:5; 1 Pet. 2:24; Mic. 5:1), in His death on the cross. But punishment with rod and stripes was to be given if Messiah sinned (2 Sam. 7:14). Yet Christ received this punishment; because God counted Him as if He were a sinner. His sharing in our condemnation was no harmless piece of theology. He really did feel, deep inside Him, that He was a sinner, forsaken by God. Instead of lifting up His face to Heaven, with the freedom of sinlessness, He fell on His face before the Father in Gethsemane (Mt. 26:39), bearing the guilt of human sin. There are times when we may feel that the righteousness of Christ makes Him somehow inaccessible to us. Even among contemporary brethren and sisters, there are some who I feel somehow distanced from, simply because I know they are far more righteous than I. And I know that there are many of us who feel the same. We feel that they just don't know what it feels like to be spiritually down and out, to feel and deeply know the dirt of our own nature. And if we have this problem with each other, we will surely have it with the Lord Jesus too. For this reason many of us lack the dynamic, close personal relationship with Christ which we should have.

And yet here on the cross, we see our Lord with all the panic of the sinner who knows He is facing judgment and death, feeling every bit, right throughout His very being, the alienation from God which sin brings. He knew the agony of separation from God because of sin. He was a sin bearer (Is. 53:11); and the idea of sin bearing was almost an idiom for being personally guilty and sinful (Num. 14:34; Ex. 28:43). The Lord was our sin bearer and yet personally guiltless. This is the paradox which even He struggled with; no wonder we do, on a far more abstract level. Is. 63:2,3 explains how in the process of obtaining salvation, the Lord's clothing would be made red. Red clothes in Isaiah suggest sinfulness that needs cleansing (Is. 1:18). He was completely identified with us, to the point of feeling a sinner even although He never sinned. Perhaps this was why Pilate marvelled so greatly at Christ's silence when under false accusation (Mk. 15:5); Pilate knew Jesus was innocent, and he had seen many innocent men being condemned in that court situation. Innocent men usually protest their innocence, desperately. But this innocent man didn't. Perhaps the paradox is explained by the fact that Jesus felt so closely identified with sinful, guilty humanity that He didn't do the natural thing, which would've been to loudly proclaim His own innocence.

The Greek word translated "forsaken" occurs also in Acts 2:27, where Peter quotes from Psalm 16 concerning how Christ was always aware of His own righteousness, and therefore confidently knew that God would not "leave (forsake) his soul in hell". In Ps. 22:1, our Lord was doubting His previous thoughts, as prophesied in Ps. 16:10. He now feared that God had forsaken Him, when previously He had been full of confidence that God would not do so, on account of His perfect character. Because Christ felt such a sinner deep within Him, He even doubted if He really was the Messiah. This is how deeply, how deeply, our Lord was our representative, this is how thoroughly He bare our own sins in His own body on the tree, this is how deeply He came to know us, to be able to exactly empathize with us in our spiritual

weakness; this was how He became able to have a fellow feeling with those who are out of the way, who have lost the faith, "for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity" (Heb. 5:2). The way the Lord felt as a sinner without being one is possibly reflected in the way He framed the parable of the prodigal son. For like it or not, the prodigal is portrayed in terms which are elsewhere applicable to Jesus- the beloved son of the Father, given the Father's wealth as His inheritance, He who was rich becoming poor, going into the Gentile world, accused of companying with prostitutes, bitterly rejected by the elder brother [cp. the Pharisees], accused of wasting wealth [by Judas], received with joy by the Father. Of course, the Lord Jesus did not sin. But why is the sinner framed in the story in the very terms which are applicable to the sinless Son of God? Surely the Lord did this to reflect the degree to which He felt His identity with sinners, although He never sinned.

Fear Of Forsaking

The greatest fear within a righteous man is that of sinning. There are many Messianic Psalms in which David, in the spirit of Christ, speaks of His fear of being forsaken by God:

"Leave me not, neither forsake me, *O God of my salvation*" (Ps. 27:9; cp. "*My God, Why hast thou forsaken me*")

"Forsake me not, O Lord: *O my God* be not far from me" (Ps. 38:21)

"Hide not thy face from thy servant... hear me speedily" (Ps. 69:17)- implying that a lack of response to prayer (as He experienced on the cross) was perceived by the Lord as rejection

"Forsake me not... *O God*, forsake me not" (Ps. 71:9,18)

"I will keep thy statutes: O forsake me not" (Ps. 119:8)

"Forsake not the works of thine own hands" (Ps. 138:8)

This points forward to how our Lord had this lifelong fear of being forsaken by God as a result of sin. Under the extreme pressure of the cross, amidst His constant self-examination, it is understandable that Christ's greatest fear, perhaps almost His paranoia, appeared to become realized. The crowd had been trying to brainwash our Lord with the idea that He had sinned; and because of His humanity and sensitivity of His personality, the Lord Jesus was perhaps subconsciously influenced by all this. He was no hard man, insensitive to the jeers of men. Remember how He was laughed *to scorn* both on the cross and in the home of Jairus, and how He did not hide His face from the *shame* which He was made to feel by men (Mt. 9:24; Ps. 22:7; Is. 50:6). Job's sufferings were another type of Christ's, and his sufferings (cp. Christ's experience on the cross) was the thing which He had greatly feared all his life (Job 3:25). The thing which Christ greatly feared, according to the Psalms, was being forsaken by God. And true enough to the Job type, this came upon Him.

Because Christ truly felt a sinner, He felt forsaken by God. This is to me the explanation of one of Scripture's most enigmatic verses: "Hear, ye deaf; and look, ye blind, that ye may see. Who is blind, but my servant? Or deaf, as my messenger that I sent? Who is blind as he that is perfect,

and blind as the Lord's servant?" (Is. 42:18,19). The Lord Jesus, as the servant, was to share the blindness and deafness of an obdurate Israel. He identified with us even in our sinfulness; and yet He was the blind who was perfect; and this is the very thing that empowers the spiritually blind to see. When God made His soul sin on the cross [AV "offering for sin" is not in the Hebrew text- it's an interpretation], *then* He saw [Heb. to perceive / discern] His seed (Is. 53:10). This all seems to mean that it was through this feeling as a sinner deep within His very soul, that the Lord Jesus came to 'see', to closely identify with, to perceive truly, us His sinful seed / children. And He did this right at the very end of His hours of suffering, as if this was the climax of His sufferings- they led Him to a full and total identity with sinful men and women. And once He reached that point, He died. The total identity of the Lord with our sinfulness is brought out in passages like Rom. 8:3, describing Jesus as being "in the likeness of sinful flesh" when He was made a sin offering; and 1 Pet. 2:24, which speaks of how He "his own self...in his own body" bore our sins "upon the tree". Note that it was at the time of His death that He was especially like this. I believe that these passages speak more of the Lord's moral association with sinners, which reached a climax in His death, than they do of His 'nature'. The Greek words *charis* [grace] and *choris* [apart] differ by one very small squiggle. This is why there's an alternative reading of Heb. 2:9: "So that apart from God [*choris theou*] he [Jesus] tasted death for us" (2). This would then be a clear reference to the way that the Lord Jesus felt apart from God at His very end. Not that He was, but if He felt like that, then this was in practice the experience which He had. Thus even when we feel apart from God- the Lord Jesus knows even that feeling.

In every other recorded prayer of His in the Gospels, the Lord addressed the Almighty as "Father"; but now He uses the more distant "My God", reflecting the separation He felt. But therefore His mind flew to Ps. 22:1, and He quoted those words: "My God, why hast thou forsaken me". But the fact His mind went to the Scriptures like that was His salvation. There is reason to think that in His last few minutes, the Lord quoted the whole of Ps. 22 out loud. Thus He asked for a drink "that the Scripture might be fulfilled", or finished, and then His words "It is finished" followed- which are actually an exact quote from the Septuagint of the last verse of Ps. 22. Psalms 22 and 69 can be clearly divided into two halves; the first half speaks of the confused thoughts of the Lord Jesus as He hung on the cross, but then there is a sudden rally, and His thoughts become clearly more confident and positive, centred around the certainty of our future salvation. As Christ quoted or at least thought through Psalm 22, He came to the glorious conclusion: Of course this is how Messiah must feel, He *must* feel forsaken, as Ps. 22 prophesied, but He would go on to save God's people! Just because Messiah would *feel* forsaken didn't mean that He Himself had sinned! We can almost sense the wave of reassurance that swept over our Lord, that deep knowledge of His own good conscience. And therefore how desperate He was, despite that ravaging thirst, to utter to the world that cry, "It is finished"; to show to us all that He had achieved God's work, that He *had* perfectly manifested the Father, and that thereby He really had achieved our redemption.

Notes

(1) This chronology is my preferred one. Yet it presents the problem (for some) of reading "three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Mt. 12:40) as an idiom rather than a literal time period. This problem is well handled in H.A. Whittaker, 'Three days and three nights', in *Studies in the Gospels*.

(2) A reading justified at length in Philip E. Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977) pp. 87-97.