

THE SON OF GOD HAS COME: MATTHEW 27-28:15

- Focus Idea:** After three years of public ministry in Palestine, Jesus is betrayed by one of his disciples, judged by a series of Jerusalem's rulers, and dies on a cross. Three days later, women intending to visit his tomb are met by an angel announcing his resurrection; they are afterward greeted by Jesus himself.
- The Context:** This extended reading stands near the conclusion of Matthew's gospel. Like the other three accounts of Jesus' life, this book slows the storytelling pace as Jesus faces his final week. In Matthew 21, the writer describes Jesus' Messianic/kingly approach into the city; he is greeted with fanfare as a liberator and deliverer of the nation. As if this was not enough to gain the attention of the powers that be in the capital, Jesus calls out the religious leaders with seven woes (Matthew 23:13-38) and speaks ominously about the fall of the temple (Matthew 24:1-34). Unable to silence the popular teacher directly, Jerusalem's leaders hire Judas, one of Jesus' followers, to hand him over quietly (26:1-5; 14-16).
- The Characters:** A number of important characters make appearances around Jesus in this sequence. The "chief priests and elders" are the Jewish scholars and teachers who make and enforce religious policy. [Pontius] Pilate is the regional governor, a merciless Roman who authorizes capital punishment against Jesus. Simon of Cyrene and Joseph of Arimathea play small but important roles in the narrative. Mary Magdalene and "the other Mary" are the first witnesses of the resurrected Jesus, a surprising turn in a culture that did not consider the testimony of women to be valid.
- The Core:** The Christian faith turns entirely on the events described in this text. For believers, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ stands as the crux of human history. All of the Bible that comes before anticipates this weekend; all that follows in some way reflects upon it.
- Chapter 27 begins with the morbid account of Judas Iscariot's remorse. When Judas saw what had become of his rabbi, he threw the thirty pieces of silver he had received for his betrayal into the temple and hung himself.
- Jesus is thereafter interviewed by Pilate, whose inclinations appear to be toward releasing him. When Jesus refuses to engage the governor, Pilate offers to free him or Barabbas, another political prisoner. The crowd, raging against Jesus, demands that Barabbas be released. Jesus is turned over to the soldiers to be mocked and crucified (27:27-31).
- Jesus was nailed to his cross at a place called Golgotha. A placard above him listed his crime (evidently) as insubordination; he has claimed to be a king in place of the rightful rulers in the land. At three o'clock in the afternoon, Jesus died. A series of miraculous events accompanied his passing, prompting the witnesses there to declare that the crucified man surely was the Son of God (27:51-54).
- Jesus was buried in the tomb of a well-to-do follower named Joseph. The religious leaders, remembering that Jesus had predicted a return from death to life, ordered that the tomb be sealed and guarded (27:62-66).
- But the effort was in vain. On Sunday morning, another earthquake signaled that Jesus had indeed been raised. Women who had come to visit his grave instead met the risen Jesus (28:1-10), and the good news quickly spread to his disciples and from there to the city beyond.