Chapter 27 – Answers

1. Why did the chief priests and elders take Jesus to Pilate early in the morning?
   1. They took Jesus to Pilate early in the morning so that the crowds that adored Jesus would not be aware of what was happening. It was a part of their conspiracy to have Jesus executed as quickly as possible.
2. Verse 3 describes Judas as being “remorseful.” Is he? What is missing?
   1. Judas may very well have been remorseful – I would trust St. Matthews account. What is missing is a “change of mind/heart” or repentance. He did not ask forgiveness of Jesus nor did try to change his ways.
3. What is fulfilled after Judas returned the 30 pieces of silver?
   1. The prophecy of Jeremiah was fulfilled when Judas returned the 30 pieces of silver (32:6-9). Remember, St. Matthew is always making connections to the Psalms and Prophets.
4. Why does the governor “wonder greatly” at what is before him in verse 11-14?
   1. Pilate “wonders greatly” because the Hebrews are attacking on of their own Who has not done anything wrong! Further, as vitriolic as the chief priests and elders were, Jesus did not reply a word to them. Pilate would have expected a defense from Jesus, especially since Pilate had the power and authority, under Roman law, to free or condemn Jesus.
5. Why does Pilate offer Barabbas to the chief priests and elders?
   1. Pilate knew that Barabbas was a notorious prisoner. Offering Barabbas as the one to receive Pilate’s clemency was sort of a test of the chief priests and elders to see how much hatred they had against Jesus, Who never engaged in any criminal activity. He purposely put Barabbas up against Jesus to show the depth of depravity of the chief priests and elders.
6. When Pilate releases Barabbas, why does he ask what should be done with Jesus?
   1. Pilate thought Jesus was innocent. As well, his wife warned him not to have anything to do with Jesus because of a dream she had. By asking the chief priests and elders what should be done with Jesus, Pilate is asking them to make the decision and absolves himself of the responsibility. Of course, this is not exactly what happens.
7. Why does Pilate wash his hands in front of the people?
   1. Pilate washes his hands in front of the mob as a sign that he is not responsible for what will happen to Jesus. Of course, this is not exactly the case.
8. Why did the Roman soldiers strip Jesus, put a scarlet robe on Him, put a crown of thorns on Him, and give Him a reed to hold?
   1. The chief priests and elders “convicted” Jesus in their own council of blasphemy. They may very well have brought some of these issues (falsely witnessed) to Pilate’s attention. However, Pilate asks, “Are you the King of the Jews.” This tells us that despite the accusation of blasphemy the leaders level on Jesus, the issue they bring to Pilate is that Jesus is calling Himself a King and, therefore, being treasonous to Rome (see Luke 23:1-3 & John 18:28-40). This is the charge officially leveled against Jesus since that is the title that is put above His head on the cross. Thus, the soldiers mocked Jesus as a king by dressing Him in a scarlet robe and placing on His head and in His hands the signs of Roman kingship. This would have been a “dark comedy” for the Romans: beholding one of their subjects allegedly calling Himself a king. After all, who was more powerful than the Romans? Certainly not the people in Judea!
9. At this point, what has been physically done to Jesus?
   1. By this time, Jesus has been beaten and whipped to the precipice of death. Taking into account all of the Evangelists, Jesus took a beating from the chief priests and elders, a beating from the whole battalion of Roman solders, was whipped mercilessly, had a crown of sharp thorns shoved on His head, and then was beaten over the head, with the crown of thorns on, with a reed.
10. Why was Simon of Cyrene compelled to carry Jesus’ cross?
    1. Jesus was beaten so severely that He was too weak to carry the cross. Therefore, the Romans compelled Simon of Cyrene, who was looking on to all that was happening, to carry Jesus’ cross.
11. Why is that place where Jesus was crucified called the “place of a skull?”
    1. Golgotha, the place where Jesus was crucified, was called the “place of the skull” because: 1) there could have been the bones of many others who were executed there 2) a rock formation in the area looking like a skull or 3) it was considered the burial spot of Adam. Please not, on the icon of the crucifixion, you will normally see a skull below the cross, under the ground. Not only does it note that this place was Golgotha, but it also suggests the resting place of Adam – where the New Adam would redeem the old.
12. Why was Jesus given gall to drink; and why were His garments divided by casting lots?
    1. Jesus was given gall to drink as a torturous punishment and to fulfill the scriptures: Psalm 69:21).
    2. The divided his garments because they wanted to keep a trophy and to fulfill the scriptures: Psalm 22:18.
13. What is the inscription over Jesus’ head? Why this inscription? But what was the reason the Hebrew leadership wanted Jesus dead?
    1. The inscription read, “This is Jesus the King of the Jews.” It was placed above His head because it was customary to put the reason for the execution above the condemns head to everyone walking by would know why this was happening and would be afraid of Roman power. The accusation brought before Pilate was that Jesus was claiming to be a king, thus making Himself treasonous to Rome. However, the chief priests and elders official condemned Jesus for blasphemy (falsely witnessed) in their own council.
14. What does the ‘wagging of the heads’ of the onlookers reflect? How about being crucified between two criminals?
    1. Both the wagging of heads and being crucified between two criminals shows a portion of the humiliation Jesus endured. As well, it fulfills the scriptures: wagging of heads=Psalm 22:6-8 and between two criminals=Isaiah 53:9. Remember, St. Matthew always connects Jesus with the Psalms and Prophets.
15. Why was their darkness over the land from the 6th hour on?
    1. There was darkness over the earth to show God’s displeasure at what was happening. What we see is the Light of Light and the One whose “life was the light of men” (John 1:4) being killed by hands of His own creation.
16. What does verse 46 mean? What is this talk of Elijah?
    1. There was a pious thought in Judaism at the time that postulated that Elijah would return from heaven (remember, he never died but was taken directly to heaven on a fiery chariot) to usher in the time of the Anointed One, the Christ. Jesus told everyone that John the Baptist was the one who was taking that position of Elijah. Nevertheless, Elijah, etymologically, employs as its root the word for “God” in Hebrew. When Jesus cried out, “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani,” people could easily have confused the word “Eli” as a call for Elijah. What was really happening is that Jesus was recited Psalm 22, which begins with those very words! Psalm 22 is the ultimate prophecy of Christ’s passion and death. Jesus is reciting it for all to hear and recognize what is happening – and perhaps for His own prayerful comfort at that most difficult moment.
17. Why is the significance of the veil in the temple being torn from top to bottom? What about the earthquake, rocks splitting, and many of the dead rising from the graves?
    1. The veil of the temple separated the holiest part of the temple from everything else. That is place were God made Himself manifest to Israel. Jesus’ incarnation, life, passion, and death means that the separation between God and man has been eliminated. So from top to bottom, from heaven to earth, God is no longer separated Himself from man through Jesus.
    2. The earthquake, splitting of rocks, and the rising of the dead happen immediately as Jesus “gave up His spirit.” This is a testament not only to God’s displeasure at what happened to His Son, but to the work and activity Jesus immediately began upon death – preaching to those in Hades and loosing the bonds of death for all the world!
18. What is the significance of verse 54?
    1. The significance of verse 54 is that the Roman centurion, a gentile, having witnessed all that had taken place, acknowledges Jesus’ divinity and sonship! Indeed, as Psalm 22:27 states, “…and all the families of the nations shall worship before You.”
19. Who were present at the crucifixion? Why?
    1. The myrrh-bearing women (Mary Magdalene, Martha, Mary (Lazaros’ sister), Salome, Johanna, Mary of Cleopas, Mary the mother of James and Joses, Susanna) and the Virgin Mary were present. They were not afraid of the Romans or of the chief priests and elders. It is also possible that the authorities may not have bothered the woman. John the Apostle and Evangelist was there. He was able to get into the mock trial because he was related to one of the chief priests. Also present were Joseph of Arimathea and Nikodemos, who helped take Jesus down from the cross (and it was Joseph of Arimathea’s tomb that was given to Jesus for His burial). They were both respected members of the council AND followers of Jesus. They were able to be close because of their bravery and because of their connections with the leadership.
20. Who took the body of Jesus? Why? What is significant about this action?
    1. Joseph of Arimathea took the body of Jesus because he was a follower of Jesus even though he was a member of the council. This is significant because Joseph had to go to Pilate to ask permission for the body. This serves to prove Jesus’ death and to show the place where He was buried.
21. Who witnessed the burial?
    1. The burial (entombment, really) was witnessed by the myrrh-bearing women (vs. 61) – particularly Mary Magdalene and the “other” Mary.
22. Why did the chief priests and elders gather with Pilate on Saturday? What does this prove?
    1. The chief priests and elders gathered with Pilate on Saturday because they were worried, in their own perverse heads, that the disciples would steal the body of Jesus and claim that He was risen from the dead. Pilate does not offer a guard. Instead, he tells them to use their own guards – and they do. This proves that Jesus was indeed dead and buried. Furthermore, this line of deceitful thought would be employed they next day as the chief priests and elders pay off the guards with a large some of money to lie and state that the body was taken by the disciples and that Jesus had not risen from the dead (28:11-15).