

THE BIG JOURNEY

from Creation to New Creation



Image from Wikimedia

Ecce Homo by Antonio Ciseri (1821-1891). "So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, 'Behold the man!'" (John 19.4-5).

eleven ► Crucified, Risen and Ascended Introduction and Questions

Jesus's final days

Jesus arrived in Jerusalem (in AD30 or AD33) five days before His crucifixion. The city was crowded with Passover pilgrims. The day after His arrival, He cleansed the Temple. Probably over the two succeeding days He concluded His public teaching. Finally, He explained to His disciples what would happen after His resurrection and through the centuries until His second coming. And He taught them to be obedient and faithful, keeping alert for His coming.

The Jewish leaders plotted to arrest Jesus. But how could they do this without provoking a riot? Then Judas turned up. He agreed to betray Jesus for money. The Jewish leaders, we may presume, paid Judas out of Temple money. This money was also used to buy the Temple sacrifices. Unwittingly, they had purchased the Lamb Whose sacrifice would fulfil all their sacrifices.

Jesus was very probably crucified on the 14th Nisan, the day that the Passover lambs were sacrificed. On the previous evening, Jesus ate a meal with His disciples - probably a Passover meal celebrated a day early. At this meal, Jesus *"took bread, . . . and said, 'Take, eat; this is my body.' And he took a cup, and . . . gave it to them, saying, 'Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.'*" (Matthew 26.26-28).

In session 7 we saw that God made a covenant with His people after He had rescued them from Egypt (Exodus 24.1-11). Moses sprinkled blood on an altar and on the people, saying: *"Behold the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you . . ."* But Israel wilfully and repeatedly broke that covenant. The penalty was death. But God accepted the death of animal sacrifices instead.

The old covenant had been broken. So God was about to make a *new* covenant. Like the old covenant, it involved blood sacrifice. Jesus said, *"this is my blood of*

the covenant" – echoing Moses's words centuries before. Jesus Himself was going to be the final, perfect sacrifice for sin. And God was going to create a new obedient people, who would be indwelt by His Holy Spirit. So, at this meal, Jesus prepared His disciples for the new life that awaited them when the Holy Spirit came. Then we overhear Jesus's wonderful 'High Priestly' prayer.

About midnight, Jesus and His disciples left Jerusalem and walked across the Kidron Valley to a walled olive orchard – the Garden of Gethsemane. There Jesus prayed. In F.W. Farrar's words: *"A grief beyond utterance, . . . a horror of great darkness"* overwhelmed our Lord. For the pure, spotless son of God, to be *"made . . . to be sin"* (2 Corinthians 5.21) - hideous, corrupt, filthy sin - was an ordeal altogether unimaginable. Above all, how could Jesus bear sin's penalty – to be estranged from His Father? But He yielded Himself to God with these words, *"nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will"* (Matthew 26.39).

The trial and crucifixion

Judas led Jewish officials and a detachment of soldiers to the garden. Jesus was arrested and taken into the city. There He was interrogated and tried. Mankind dared to put the Son of God on trial! The witnesses' testimony was false; their evidence broke down. Then the High Priest demanded: *"Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?"* (Mark 14.61). Jesus replied: *"I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven."* (Mark 14.62). His words, based on Daniel 7.13, sealed His fate. Jesus was mocked and abused by his captors, a foretaste of the brutality to come. The Jewish authorities made their decision. They wanted Jesus executed. So they submitted the case to Pilate, the Roman Governor.



Image from Wikimedia

He is Guilty of Death painted by Vasily Polenov (1844–1927). The artist portrays the moment when Caiaphas the high priest, and the chief priests, elders and scribes gathered with him, declare Jesus to be worthy of death (Matthew 26.66, Mark 14.64).

But Pilate knew that Jesus was innocent. He tried to release him. To appease the crowd, Pilate had Jesus flogged. The soldiers then cruelly mocked and battered their victim. Pilate again declared Jesus innocent and presented Him to the crowd. But the baying mob insisted on His execution. Miserably defeated, Pilate caved in. Jesus was led away and, along with two others, crucified - a brutal and revolting form of execution. At noon, a supernatural darkness closed in on the horrific scene. The darkness lasted three long hours.

Peter tells us that Jesus *"bore our sins in his body on the tree"* (1 Peter 2.24). He assumed responsibility for all human sin and suffered its penalty – to be cut off from His Father's presence, to be the object of His Father's wrath. After the hours of darkness, Jesus cried: *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"* (Matthew 27.46). Jesus suffered until the full price of our sin was paid. Only God knew what Jesus was enduring for us - the agonies of His spirit and soul infinitely outweighing those of His body.

Sin had colossal consequences, as we saw in session 4. Jesus's death, resurrection and ascension dealt with all of them. We'll see how in session 13.



[Image](#) from Wikimedia

Crucifixion by the Romans by Vasily Vereshchagin (1842-1904). In this magnificent panorama, the artist focuses on the crowd. We, the viewers, almost become part of the crowd, peering over the mass of people to get a closer look. The sky is dark and glowering. Among the crowd, Roman soldiers with their spears and lances stand ready to quieten disorder. Two officials talk with a Roman soldier on the hill.

Then suddenly, Jesus cried out in triumph, *"It is finished"* (John 19.30). His work was complete. Jesus yielded up His spirit and died.

Joseph of Arimathea removed Jesus's body from the cross. It was quickly prepared and buried in Joseph's own new tomb. The tomb was sealed, and a guard posted to prevent the disciples faking His resurrection.

The resurrection and ascension

Jesus's body lay in the tomb. But death's decay could not touch Him. Early on Sunday, an earthquake struck and an angel rolled back the stone at the tomb's entrance. This wasn't to let Jesus out – it was to let people in and show that He had risen! The guards went and told the Jewish leaders all that they had seen. It was doubtless clear to all that something supernatural had happened. So the leaders invented a story - hence the improbable tale of the stolen body.

Combining the four Gospel accounts, we can follow John Wenham's plausible reconstruction of events on that momentous day. Very early in the morning, Mary Magdalene and other women return to the tomb to finish embalming Jesus's body. They find the stone rolled back. Mary dashes off to tell Peter and John, who run to the tomb. They enter and find just the graveclothes.

Meanwhile, after Mary Magdalene has gone, the other women enter the tomb. Two angels appear. One explains that Jesus has risen, and instructs them to tell His disciples that they will see Him in Galilee. Bewildered, yet full of joy, they rush back to tell Peter and John and others with them. But in Jerusalem's maze of streets, they don't meet Peter and John who are running in the opposite direction to the tomb.

Before the women arrive back and tell the wonderful news to Mary Magdalene and the others, Mary returns to the tomb. So she's still unaware of Jesus's resurrection. Weeping, she peers into the dark sepulchre. The angels speak to her. She replies; then she turns. She sees Jesus, but thinks He's the gardener. Jesus says, *"Mary"*. Her grief turns to astonished delight. But He says: *"Do not cling to me, . . . but go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"* (John 20.17).

Mary then returns to the house where the other women and John and Peter are. From there, two or more of the women hurry to bring news of Jesus's resurrection to the other disciples, who are probably in Bethany. On their way, Jesus appears to them. That day, too, Jesus appears to Peter, too. And Jesus

appears to Cleopas and his companion on their journey to Emmaus - but they don't recognise Him until sharing a meal with Him at their destination. The two men race back to Jerusalem to tell the disciples and the others with them. As they all talk over everything that has happened, Jesus appears to them. So concludes that amazing day.

Jesus appeared a number of times during the weeks between His resurrection and His ascension. He explained the Scriptures to His followers and commissioned them to take His gospel out to all nations. There were plenty of eyewitnesses during the Church's early years to confirm that Jesus was risen.

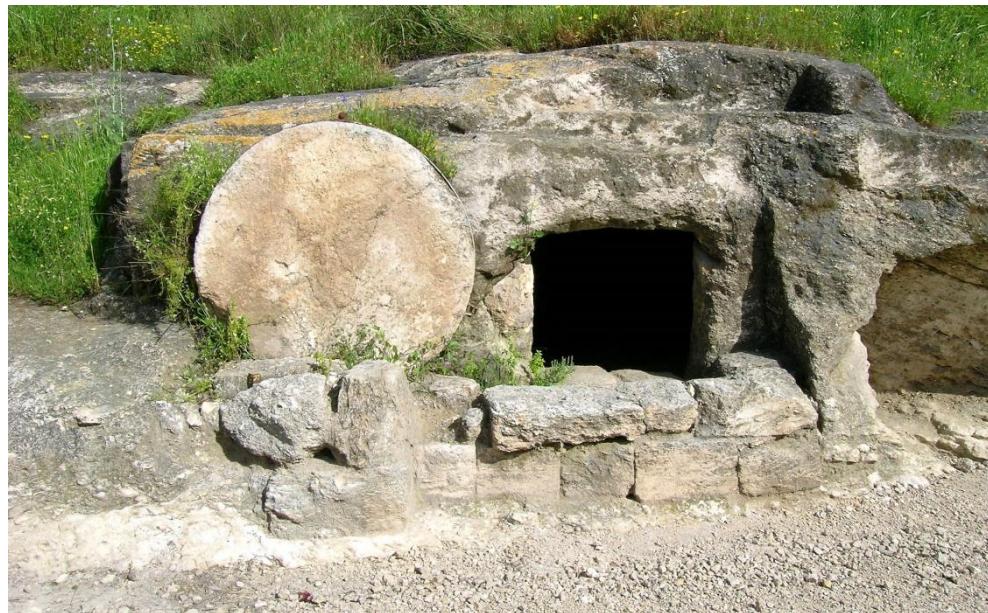


Image © BiblePlaces.com

An excellent example of an ancient rolling stone tomb.

Finally, it seems that Jesus met with His disciples shortly before His ascension, perhaps the evening before. Then Jesus went with the disciples to the Mount of Olives, blessed them and ascended to His Father in Heaven. He sat down at His Father's right hand, enthroned over all creation – including Satan and all his forces of evil.

The Son of God ruled creation from the moment He made it. But now He ruled it as a Man, too. A Member of our human race now has all authority in Heaven and Earth! A Man of David's dynasty sits on David's throne and rules the Universe. Jesus will reign "*until he has put all his enemies under his feet*" (1 Corinthians 15.25). And those who are born again by God's Spirit are seated with Him in heavenly places. They share in His victory over the evil powers.

Bible passages and questions

Read these accounts of Jesus's last days on Earth: John 18.1-20.29, Matthew 26.36-68, 27.45-28.20, Luke 22.6-23, 23.7-12, 39-43, 24.44-53. Also read: Luke 1.32-33, Romans 4.25, 5.6-11, 6.3-11, 1 Corinthians 5.7, 15.3-8, 12-23, Ephesians 1.19-23, 2.4-7, Philippians 3.20-21, Colossians 2.11-15, Hebrews 10.11-14, 1 Peter 1.3.

- ? What is the significance of the fact that Jesus died at the feast of Passover?
- ? Two gardens appear in the Passion narrative – Gethsemane and the garden where the tomb was. What significance does this have?
- ? Why can't God just forgive sin, without Jesus having to die for us?
- ? What is the significance of the Resurrection for us today?
- ? What is the significance of the Ascension for us today?