

27When the morning came, all the chief priests and elders of the people took counsel against Yeshua to put him to death: ²And when they had bound him, they led him away, and delivered him to Pontius Pilate the governor. ³Then Yehudah, who had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, ⁴saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? See you to that. ⁵And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself.

commentary

27:1 took counsel against Yeshua – In the morning they held a council, with more members being present than in the preceding night (cf. *Matt. 26:57; Mark 15:1*). The fourth gospel assumes the reunion still took place at Qayapha's place (cf. *John 18:28*), therefore, it was still not the Sanhedrin of the sages at the Temple. Although Luke moves the trial to the morning (cf. *Luke 22:66-71*), in the earliest Keifa tradition they did not gather in the morning to judge Yeshua's possible crimes, but to discuss how to carry out the death punishment for the charge of blasphemy which they had already agreed upon (*Matt. 26:66*). They decided to execute him in the most ignominious way possible and give him away to the Romans. This is the sin of "selling of Yosef" (cf. *Tanhuma, Vayigash 5; Amos 2:6*).

27:2 to Pontius Pilate – He was the governor of Judea from 26/27 to 36/37 c.e.. The tension between Pilate and the Judeans is well attested by Philo and Josephus. Although they charged Yeshua of blasphemy (which is a religious crime for which Rome had no jurisdiction), they determined that the only way to carry out the death penalty under Rome was to charge him for insurrection – again, a false accusation.

27:3 when he saw he was condemned – We cannot judge Yehudah's intentions as if he was the archenemy in a fiction novel. He is a complex character that shows humanity. Perhaps he was disappointed on Yeshua's ministry, perhaps he wanted to maintain the status quo at the Temple or perhaps he wanted to force Yeshua into showing himself as the king of the Jews, but despite the wickedness in his treason, it was still not his intention to have Yeshua executed. When he saw the priests had intended from the beginning to have him killed, he realized his mistake. The complexity in his behavior is the reason that different accounts offer contradictory interpretations: some accounts saying he was a "demon" (*John 6:70*), and other accounts saying the treason was agreed upon between Yeshua's soul and Yehudah (cf. *Gnostic gospel of Judas*).

27:4 I have sinned in that I have betrayed innocent blood – The word 'innocent' also means righteous, i.e., tzaddiq. As the prophet says, "because they sold a tzaddiq for money, and a poor man for a pair of shoes" (*Amos 2:6*). The word *tzaddiq* here refers to Yosef's innocence. The pair of shoes refers to their way of walking. In short, they wanted to maintain the status quo, to maintain their position in Jerusalem and at the Temple and to keep being the teachers of the people. By saying "I have betrayed innocent blood," Yehudah is referencing a verse in the Torah: "Do not pollute the land in which you live, for the blood pollutes the land. And for the land there can be no atonement for the [innocent] blood that was spilled in it, except through the blood of the one who spilled it" (*Numbers 35:33*). First he tried to amend his wrongdoing, but seeing that it was impossible, he most likely decided to atone for it with his own life, measure for measure, spilling his own blood for the sake of the innocent blood he had caused to be spilled. Somehow this echoes Yeshua's harsh criticism against whoever causes a young Torah student to stumble: "to him it would be better to have an ass' millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea" (*Matt. 18:6*). This is in the aspect of "This transgression will not be forgiven except with your death" (*Isa. 22:14*), which implies that death accompanied with repentance are a form of spiritual atonement (*Mekhilta d'Rabbi Yishmael 20:7*).

⁵And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself.

—textual variants—

27:5 and went and hanged himself – While the synoptics agree that Yehudah Iscariot killed himself, the Keifa tradition and the Pauline tradition diverge on the way he died. The author of Mattai says Yehudah hanged himself, that is, mirroring Yeshua’s execution, and then the priests bought a field with the money he had thrown at them. Luke, on the other hand, says that Yehudah himself bought the field and afterwards fell headlong in it – either he threw himself down into the field or fell by accident – causing all of his bowels to gush out (*Acts 1:18*). The different versions of Yehudah’s suicide are caused by the “broken telephone” effect, where an oral message gets more distorted the more it travels from person to person. Nevertheless, there have been many attempts at harmonization; the most accepted one being that of the 4th century Christian father Augustine of Hippo, who theorized that Mattai and Luke narrate different aspects of the same event – that Yehudah hanged himself in the field but the rope eventually snapped and the fall over the rocky pavement burst his body open. Then the priests bought the field in Yehudah’s name (*Harmonia Evangeliorum II:24:64*). Most modern scholars reject this theory, as the gospels are independent works which were not meant to be read in light of each other. Mattai narrates the earliest version of Yehudah’s death and is probably the most historically accurate. It is also the only source among the gospels that does not demonize Iscariot to the excess, as his bad reputation probably went increasing over the years. Some scholars argue that Mattai’s version of Iscariot’s suicide was built in base of Ahitophel’s treason against king David: Like Yeshua, David would also pray at the top of the mount of Olives for God to protect him of Ahitophel’s treason (*2Sam. 15:31-32*). Ahitophel intended to capture David with a crowd of twelve thousand men (*2Sam. 17:1*). Like Yehudah, Ahitophel hanged himself in his own field (*2Sam 17:23*). However, the stories and personalities of Yehudah and Ahitophel are totally different: Unlike Ahitophel, Yehudah did not intend to kill Yeshua, and Ahitophel committed suicide, not in regret of having David killed – like Yehudah did – but because the king rejected his plan to murder king David. A more accepted way to interpret Mattai and Luke’s different accounts would be that Luke’s version speaks in symbolic language, so Yehudah’s falling and his bowels gushing out would refer to his spiritual status and his emotions and not to his literal bowels.

—commentary—

27:5 in the temple – More specifically in the Holy Place within the Temple, as the Aramaic uses the word *heikal* הֵיכָל. He hurled the money through the curtain, to the surprise of the priests who were inside. By doing so, he was demonstrating the very same attitude Yeshua showed when he cleansed the Temple. While later tradition pretty much demonized Yehudah as the wicked disciple who betrayed the master, to the point of calling him a demon doomed to destruction (cf. *John 17:12*), the author of Mattai, being the earliest source on the matter, depicts a Yehudah who did in fact repent of his sin, although he went crazy because of it. He was not only “filled with remorse” as modern scholars claim; he does everything in his hand to undo his mistake, which shows authentic repentance. His suicide was a consequence of his mental breakdown.

27:5 and went and hanged himself – On the one hand, Yehudah was trying to perform a *tiqun* and placate Heaven’s wrath, as explained above. On the other hand, taking one’s own life is still considered murder and it is forbidden, as explained in the Torah, “you are forbidden from taking a human life, even your own, either by shedding blood [if you shed it by yourself] or by hanging” (*Gen. 9:5, Rashi; Bava Qama 91b; Bereshit Rabbah 34*). God made it clear when he said: “I have put before you life and death... Choose life” (*Deut. 30:19*). It is possible that given his circumstances, he thought Heaven would be more merciful on him if he punished himself for his crime rather than receiving full retribution in Gehenna. This is similar to Shimshon’s self-immolation: “Let me die with the Philistines” (*Judg. 16:30*). There is so much complexity in this matter; we do not really know what takes place in a suicidal’s mind before or during suicide. Sometimes not even the suicidal person understands himself. Hence, not knowing the full story, we only judge by appearances, we

⁶And the chief priests took the silver pieces, and said, It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood. ⁷And they took counsel and bought with them the potter's field as a burial place for foreigners. ⁸This is why that field was called the Field of Blood to this day.

commentary

see the surface of the matter, but God is the only true judge, only he knows the full story, and only he will judge that person according to the truth. This is why, upon hearing the news of someone's departure, we recite the blessing, "*Barukh dayan emet*" – Blessed be the true judge. In the hallakha it is stated that we do not attend a suicide, as he has excommunicated himself from the community of Israel (cf. *Shulkhan Arukh, Yoreh Deah 345:1*), but to determine if someone is a suicide, we judge with the attribute of mercy. If someone has shown compelling intention to take his own life, we must treat him as suicide. However, if a person has been found hung, even if the surrounding circumstances lead one to believe that such person took his own life, nevertheless, he is not considered a suicidal, because perhaps someone else hanged him or was coerced into hanging himself (*ibid. 345:2; Semakhot 2:5*). Perhaps he did not commit suicide willfully, but under pressure, to avoid a terrible torture at the hand of his enemies, or perhaps he was mentally unstable at that moment, which is considered an involuntary suicide (cf. *Yevamot 78b*). This is how we judge someone's suicide for hallakhic purposes. As for this person's punishment in the afterlife, only God is the only true judge.

27:6 it is not lawful... because it is the price of blood – They knew what they did was illegal. The only reason they would not accept the money in such a way would be to keep appearances for those who witnessed the scene at the Temple or the suicide.

27:7 bought with them the potter's field – It appears they mention a potter that we should be aware of. In truth, The Potter's Field was the former name of the shroud before Iscariot died on it, because potters collected there clay for the production of ceramics. After collecting clay, the place would be unusable for agriculture.^a The Field of the Potter, *Haqel haYotzer*, literally, the Field of the one who gives form, seems to imply that Yehudah's death in that field was all part of God's bigger Divine plan.

27:8 the Field of Blood – In truth this name should be left untranslated, as it is the name of a place. Field of Blood is the literal translation of the Aramaic name: *Haqel-Dama* חקל דמא. The field has a complex of tombs for gentiles, for the poor and for people who have been excommunicated from Israel. The earliest tombs date to the first century and contain the remains of someone afflicted with leprosy.^b It was still used as a burial place up to the 19th century CE. The Gospels intend to explain why the field is called this way: Because it is a living testimony of Yeshua's innocent blood being spilled by treason. As for the location, the place is known to be surrounded by the rocky cliffs of mount Tzion and close to the valley of Hinom – or in Hebrew "*Ge-Hinom*" (name which Judaism uses to refer to hell or purgatory). The author of Luke explaining that Yehudah "fell" into that field could easily provoke the image of Yehudah's literal and spiritual descent from mount Tzion into Gehinom.

^a cf. Thomas Bahde, The common dust of Potter's Field.

^b cf. Carney D. Matheson, Molecular exploration of the first century tomb of the shroud in Akeldama, Jerusalem.

⁹Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by the prophet, saying, And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price set on him by the children of Israel; ¹⁰and gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord appointed me.

textual variants

27:9 that which was spoken by the prophet – “Spoken by the prophet” as we have it here is found in the Peshitta, the Syriac (*Sinaiticus*), the Coptic, some Latin mms (cf. *Veronensis*) and some Greek mms (cf. *Beratinus; minuscule 33*). Most Byzantine-type Greek mms read “Spoken by Jeremiah the prophet.” However, the reference to the thirty pieces of silver is from Zechariah (11:12-13). The Hebrew in the Shem Tov reads indeed “Zechariah the prophet.” The mention of Jeremiah might have been a careless mistake from a Greek copyist (cf. *Eusebius, Demonstratio 10:4*). Some scholars argue that perhaps this refers to the fact that Jeremiah headed the Prophets literature in some old lists, but there are two reasons to discard this theory: first, in the Jewish Bible the Prophet’s literature does not start with the prophets themselves, but with the book of Yehoshua, a.k.a., Joshua, as he is the prophetic successor of Moshe. Secondly, when the gospels wanted to mention the “Prophets” as a corpus of literature they did so by literally calling them *haNeviim*; the Prophets (*Matt. 5:17; 7:12; 11:13; Luke 24:44*). A more plausible explanation is that the reference itself should be read as a mixed citation of both Zecharia and Jeremiah (*chapters 18-19*).

commentary

27:9 Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by the prophet – Zechariah reads, “And they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver, and the Lord said to me, Cast it to the keeper of the treasury, to the stronghold of treasury of glory – of which I stripped them. And I took the thirty pieces of silver, and I cast it into the house of the Lord, to the keeper of the treasury” (*Zech. 11:12-13*). The Prophet’s meaning is that he called the leaders of Judah to repentance, and they rejected him. Then he asked them to put a price on his prophetic message and they gave him the price of a slave; thirty pieces. Mattai is not quoting verbatim the words of Zechariah, but conflating different portions from Jeremiah and Zechariah and applying them as a peshet to their situation with Iscariot, Yeshua and the chief priests. We often see this type of interpretative quotations among the Talmudic sages as well, as we have explained many times before. The chief priests paid thirty coins for Yeshua’s arrest, so that is the price they determined he was worth, then Yehudah tossed the coins at them in the Temple. Mattai reads: “And they took [the money]” instead of: “And I took [the money],” which is what the prophet reads. This is because he is having the surrounding verses of Zechariah in mind. The prophet “took the money” in obedience to God, but it was a symbolism of what will happen to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, as verse 6 says “I will not have pity on the inhabitants of the Land.” Therefore, in a sense, it is them who took the money.

27:10 and gave them for the potter’s field – There is no specific verse in the Tanakh that matches this quote neither in the Hebrew nor in the LXX translation. This is, as mentioned above, because Mattai is giving us an interpretative quotation. The money being “given” for the potter’s field is an interpretative rendering, in the form of an Aramaic Targum. Zechariah reads “And I cast it into the house of the Lord, to the keeper of the treasury” (*Zech. 11:13*), which Mattai here interprets to mean, “I gave them [i.e., the priests] the money.” In order to understand the reference to the potter’s field, we need to read Jeremiah. It says: “Rise and go to the potter’s house” (*Jer. 18:2*) ... “Hear... inhabitants of Jerusalem... Behold, I am bringing evil upon this place... because they forsook me... and filled this place with blood of innocent people” (*Jer. 19:3-4*). It continues “So I will break this people... like one who breaks the potter’s vessel... and in the Tophet they will bury without place to bury” (*ibid. 19:11*). Mattai’s fulfilment of these words is as a peshet: “I will bring evil upon this place... Because they forsook me” was the actual situation of Jerusalem in Yeshua’s days which lead to the destruction of the Temple. “In the Tophet they will bury.” Tophet is in the valley of Hinom, and so was the potter’s field in which Iscariot killed himself (*see notes on Matt. 27:7 and 27:8*). Therefore, when the prophet

¹¹And Yeshua stood before the governor: and the governor asked him, saying, Are you the king of the Jews? And Yeshua said to him, You have said so. ¹²And when he was accused of the chief priests and elders, he answered nothing. ¹³Then Pilate said to him, Don't you hear how many things they testify against you?

—commentary—

says that in “the Tophet they will bury,” Mattai interprets it to mean that they – the corrupted priesthood – will turn the potter’s field into a burial place.

27:11 Yeshua stood before the governor – The story continues where verse 27:2 left.

27:11 Are you the king of the Jews? – This is because the chief priests told Pilate that he declared himself the Messiah (cf. *Mark 15:9, 12*). Under the Roman Empire, attracting masses while claiming to be king of Judea was a political act of sedition punished by death (cf. *Tacitus, Annals 4:70; 6:7*). It was a very well-known fact that Yeshua was a descendant of king David and heir to the throne, the earliest source being the letters of Paul (*Rom. 1:3*). However, he never ruled as a king. The fourth gospel records a long conversation between Yeshua and Pilate (probably a conversation in the manner of midrash, which probably never took place in real life). In this conversation, when Pilate asks whether he is the king of the Jews, Yeshua inquires where does the idea come from and Pilate says that the Judeans and the chief priests accuse him of that. Then Yeshua responds, “My kingdom is not of this world” (*John 18:34-36*). That the early communities saw in Yeshua a type of king from the world to come is seen in all the Nazarene literature. In the letter to the Hebrews, where Yeshua is described as a heavenly priest, it says: “In this earth he is not a priest, because there are already [kosher] priests... according to the Torah [i.e., the Levites]” (*Hebrews 8:4*). What type of king is he? Not an earthly king. His rulership was to “bear witness of the truth” (*John 18:37-38*). Pilate does not understand the answer and asks, “What is truth?” As our sages say, Truth is the seal of God (*Shabbat 55a*). The righteous people observe Torah from *Alef* to *Tav* (*ibid.*). *Alef* א is the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet and *Tav* ת is the last letter. In the middle of the alphabet is the letter *Mem* מ. Together, they spell the word “*EMET*” אמת (Truth). The tzaddiq gamor (the perfect tzaddiq) as a living Torah is the *Alef* and the *Tav*, as expounded by Rabbi Aqiva, “You must be in awe of [et את] the Lord your God (*Deut. 10:20*); the word *et* refers to the wise Torah learners” (*Pesakhim 22b*). Truth is how God sees the world. *Middat haEmet* (the attribute of Truth) is a state of being in this world, of understanding God’s will and living as if the world to come is not separated from this world. This is the type of kingdom Yeshua brings into our world.

27:11 You have said so – The ambiguous response avoids a direct answer. Some interpret it as, “You said so, not me.” Others understand it to mean, “Yes, as you said.” The phrase is not clear enough to be evidence of anything. The Talmud records a similar incident where Eliezer ben Hyrcanus was arrested and gave an ambiguous response to the governor. In his interrogation he said, “I consider the judge trustworthy,” and although by “the judge” he meant God, the governor thought he was referring to him (*Tosefta Hullin 2:24*). Yeshua had no troops, no wealth, no pretensions, and no intention to start a war. In the eyes of Pilate, how could he possibly pose any threat to Rome? If at all, he was merely a crazy man or someone inexplicably hated by his people for some religious reason.

¹⁴But he did not answer, not even a word; to the greatest amazement of the governor. ¹⁵Now it was the governor's custom at that festival to release a prisoner the crowd would choose.

commentary

27:14 He did not answer, not even a word – This is in the aspect of what is written, “He was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers; he did not open his mouth” (*Isaiah 53:7*). “I will keep a curb on my mouth while the wicked is before me” (*Psalms 39:2*). Silence is a fence of wisdom taught in Hassidut. “Even when others attack and insult him, a person must judge from the side of mercy and maintain his silence. In kabbalah, this forms the aspect of Keter” (*Liqutei Moharan 1:6:15*). As Keter כתר (crown) is the highest sefirah, this means there is no greater act of humility and self-nullification than remaining silent over others offenses. It is a level of humility that requires a great *emunah* (faith) in that God rules the world with justice and in that we transcend this world. Indeed, the word *keter* can also be read as *katar* כתר, which means waiting, for the person waits for God to justify him, as it says (*Iyov 36:2*), “wait כתר for me and I will tell you” (*Liqutei Moharan 1:6:2*). There are two aspects of keeping silent under false accusations. On the side of mercy (the right side), one is empathic towards someone else's train of thought and accepts that in this person's mind he deserves to be insulted (*ibid 6:15*). On the side of rigor (the left side), a righteous silence serves to accumulate affliction over the wicked offender, as it says about the saints, “they are like the sun rising in the night.” It means they are like God's flame, which will eventually consume the wicked (cf. *Liqutei Moharan 1:82:2*). It is thus written, “a fool's heart inclines to his left” (*Eccl. 10:2*). The Psalm says, “Be *dom* דום [silent in resignation] before God and hope patiently התחילל for him” (*Psalms 37:7*). The meaning is “Resign yourself before Hashem [i.e., accept your judgment without doing anything] and he will strike them down as corpses [in Hebrew, *Halalim* חללים, which has the same root as the word for hope patiently]” (*Gittin 7a*).

27:15 it was the governor's custom – The meaning is that this was something Pilate did on his own; it was not a Roman or a Jewish official procedure. A few scholars suggest that, perhaps because there were many Jewish prisoners with the same name, Pilate used to ask the masses which was which – hence, “Whom do you want me to release for you?” – In the gospels this would have turned into “it was the governor's custom.”^c Said this, the Roman custom of releasing prisoners can be traced back to the 399 b.c.e, in ceremonies known as *Lectisternium*, where they celebrated banquets dedicated to their gods, and during which time people refrained from quarrels, lawsuits were cancelled and prisoners were released (cf. *Titus, Livius 5:13:7*). Although in later times it seemed to follow more specific dates of the Roman calendar, the custom took place any time in the year, even many times during the year, in celebration of victories or any other significant event.^d It would not be surprising if Pilate held indeed some form of *Lectisternium* during the Jewish Passover while he was governor of Judea, precisely honoring his gods for Rome's superiority during the days when, ironically, the Jews celebrated their freedom from Egyptian slavery.

^c cf. Paul Winter, *Trial of Jesus*, pp. 91-99.

^d cf. *Bellum Gallicum 8:51:3*; Tacitus, *Annals 15:44*; G. Wissowa, *Religion and Kultus der Romer*, p.355 seq.

¹⁶And they had then a notable prisoner, called Bar-Abba. ¹⁷Therefore when they were gathered together, Pilate said to them, Whom do you want me to release for you? Bar-Abba or Yeshua who is called the Messiah?

textual variants

27:16 notable prisoner called Bar-Abba – The Syriac Sinaitic, the Codex Koridethi and other Caesarean manuscripts read “Yeshu Bar-Abba” (ישו בר אבא) or “Yeshua Bar-Abba” (ישוע בר אבא). Same in verse 17. This reading was well known by Origen, whose copy of Mattai contained this name (cf. *Origen on Matt. 27:17*). The name “Yeshu” is omitted in most manuscripts, including the Peshitta. According to some scholars, it was omitted because copyists did not want to create confusion among readers by having the prisoner’s name identical to that of Yeshua of Nazareth. It is very unlikely that a believer in Yeshua would intentionally insert this name for a criminal. This enforces the argument that the name was not a later made-up addition, but probably part of Mattai’s original reading. However, its absence in most manuscripts leads one to believe that perhaps it was a Caesarea-centered tradition. Instead of Bar-Abba, the gospel according to the Hebrews and the Hebrew DuTillet read בר רבה “Bar-Rabbah,” meaning “son of Rabbah” or “son of his master” (cf. *Origen*). Bar-Abba is not the prisoner’s proper name, but his identification: either he was the son of someone called Abba (cf. *Eirubin 13b*), or a nickname meaning “son of the Father.” The Hebrew Shem-Tov borrows the name from a direct Greek transliteration: “*Barabbas*” (ברב"ש; Βαραββᾶς).

commentary

27:16 notable prisoner called Bar-Abba – Mark (the earliest synoptic) says that he was “imprisoned together with insurrectionists who had committed murder in the uprising [against Rome]” (*Mark 15:7*). Luke offers the same narrative (*Luke 23:19*). In Josephus’ language, Bar-Abba was a revolutionary or a Sicarii who attempted to free Judea from the yoke of Rome. Mattai, however, only defines him as a “notable prisoner;” he does not even refer to him as a criminal. He is also the only one giving him a proper name: “Yeshu” ישו (This is, in the pre-3rd century Caesarean reading). One may wonder why. The answer is as follows: Mark and Luke are giving us the historical version of the story, namely, that Pilate gave the people the choice to deliver a zealot who murdered someone (probably a Roman) or to deliver Yeshua, who had not committed any crime, but was hated by the chief priests. Mattai, on the other hand, is turning the story into a midrash; in other words, he is allegorizing the actual incident.

27:17 Bar-Abba or Yeshua – In Mattai’s allegorized version of the story, Yeshu Bar-Abba and Yeshua the Messiah can be interpreted as two sides of the same coin. Both are named Yeshua (Yeshu is another way to say Yeshua). Both are “a notable prisoner,” although not necessarily criminals. Bar-Abba (son of Abba) alludes to the Galilean custom of referring to God as “Abba” (Father).^e In fact, Yeshua’s prayer begins with the word “Avinu” (our Father). Additionally, the term Bar-Abba (lit. son of the Father) can be interpreted as a euphemism for “son of God,” which, as explained above, is synonymous with Messiah (cf. *Matt. 26:63*). In other words: Yeshu Bar-Abba – i.e., Yeshua the son of God – and Yeshua who is called the Messiah are one and the same. Where is the allegory, then? It is at this specific moment in history that the actual Yeshua of Nazareth was split into two: On the one hand, there was this historical Yeshua; a Galilean Torah-observant Jew from Nazareth, considered a messianic figure by the masses who became executed by the Romans at the petition of the corrupted priesthood. On the other hand, this same Yeshua became a paradoxical figure interpreted and re-interpreted differently by everybody. For some he was a criminal, for some he was a deliverer. After the destruction of the Temple the Romans would accept him as Yeshua the Messiah and preserve his texts, but with their philosophical re-interpretations of the Bible they would turn him into a

^e cf. Hyam Maccoby, *Jesus and Barabbas*, *New Testament studies*, pp.55-60; Steval L. Davies, *Who si called Barabbas?* P. 260-262.

¹⁷Bar-Abba or Yeshua who is called the Messiah?

 commentary

deity. Conversely, mainstream Judaism would reactionarily turn him into “Yeshu” the heretic, and although they preserved his actual teachings, they gave him and his texts away to the gentiles. Therefore, this paradox is created, where these who want to deliver Bar-Abba are the same people who want Yeshua hanged (him being the same person) and these who think Yeshua is innocent, are the same people who send him to be tortured and executed. This fulfilled Yeshua’s own words that he came to bring “sword and not peace” (*Matt. 10:34-36*). In the end, all of these differing points of view on Yeshua’s persona stem from the fact that he was arrested and sentenced to death under Pontius Pilate. The masses who were witnessing his trial before the Roman governor, those who were once following him and even the Romans who were ready to torture, all of them had to go through this dilemma: “If he was a Torah scholar, a righteous person, i.e., a tzaddiq, the son of David, and if we believed he was the Messiah, why are the priests insulting him? Why is he being brought before Pilate? If he preached about mitzvot and loving your neighbor, why is the Roman governor sentencing him to death for insurrection? If he was innocent, why did God not save him?” This was undoubtedly a recurrent mental debate at that time which, understandably, led to Yeshua’s soul being split into many different roles for humankind. This was the primary affliction of Yeshua’s spirit as the embodiment of Messiah ben Yosef. Come and see: Messiah ben Yosef’s mission is threefold:^f firstly, to reveal deeper levels of the Torah – as Yosef’s name: *Tzafnat-Paneakh* צפנת פנח, means ‘revealer of that which is encoded’ (*Onqelos on Gen. 41:45*). Secondly, ingathering of the exiles and rebuilding Jerusalem, as it is written, “Who will ascend the mountain of Hashem?” מִי-יַעֲלֶה בְהַר יְיָ (*Psalm 24:3*). The initials of this phrase form the acronym of MBY מבי, as this force seeks the gathering of his people like a hen gathers his chicks (cf. *Matt. 23:37*). Similarly it is written, “Return to your cities” שְׁבִי אֶל עִירֶיךָ (*Jer. 31:20*), which has the same numerical value of עדות ביהוסף “testimony in Yosef” (=643). The third aspect of his mission is to remove the spirit of uncleanness from the nation, i.e., to defeat and remove the evil inclination. It is thus written, “Yehoshua [ben Yosef] did as Moshe told him, to fight with Amaleq” (*Exod. 17:10*) and, “Hashem wages with Amaleq in every generation” (*Exod. 17:16*) which implies the force of MBY wages war with Amaleq in every generation “until I make your enemies a footstool at your feet” (*Psalm 110:1*). Of Yosef it is written that “He has the glory of a firstborn ox” (*Deut. 33:17*) because he is to fight the wars of God and conquer his enemies (cf. *Vilna Gaon, Aderet Eliyahu*). In addition to this, Messiah ben Yosef’s mission to lead the world into the messianic era is a mission that involves all the nations of the world, hence he will take their form to be accepted by them: Just like the inscription of the Torah on stones had to be written in the seventy languages of the world (cf. *Mishna Sotah 7:5; cf. Deut. 27:1-8*), Yosef haTzaddiq spoke seventy languages which he learnt from Gavriel himself (*Sotah 36b*). This explains that each nation will understand MBY’s message in a personal manner. However, on the fulfilment of these missions, the soul of Messiah ben Yosef will experience great agony. First of all, Yosef was exiled from among his people, then enslaved and then Egyptianized, as it is written, “And [after his exile from his land...] he was placed before the entire land of Egypt... and he [Pharaoh] gave him for a wife Asenath, daughter of... the priest of On” (*Gen. 41:42-45*). He was clothed in Egyptian clothes and given in marriage to the daughter of a pagan priest, so the nations of the world would worship him like a pagan deity, not recognizing that he is a son of Israel, hence it is written, “And they cried before him, *Abrekh!*” (*Gen. 41:42*). *Abrekh* אברך comes from a root that means kneeling בריכה, thus implying that just like nations worshipped Pharaoh as a manifestation of the god Rah on earth, they worshipped Yosef in the same way.

^f cf. Qol haTor 1:6a.

¹⁸For he knew that they had handed him over to him out of envy. ¹⁹When he was sitting down on the judgment seat, his wife sent to him, saying, Do not have anything to do with that just man, because I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him. ²⁰But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask for Bar-Abba, and have Yeshua destroyed.

commentary

This teaches that one of the pains Messiah ben Yosef will experience in his mission is to be worshipped by the nations, until the day of his restoration, when everybody will see him again as a son of Israel. Furthermore, our sages explain that Messiah ben Yosef is bound to die in his battle against the evil inclination (cf. *Sukka* 52a). Hence, the phrase, כי גזר מארץ חיים “for he was cut off the land of the living” (*Isa.* 53:8) has the numerical value of משיח אפרים “Messiah of Ephraim” (=689). The kabbalists have explained that the very beginning of his redemption comes with affliction, with suffering brought by Armilus, the angel of the *erev rav* (cf. *Qol haTor* 1:13). Because of Israel’s many sins Messiah ben Yosef is not recognized among his own people (*ibid.* 2:39) as it is written, “Yosef recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him” (*Gen.* 42:8). He thus bears the pain of our chastisement upon himself, as it is written, “He was wounded because of our transgression, he was crushed because of our iniquities, the chastisement of our welfare was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed” (*Isaiah* 53:5). The phrase “we are healed” נרפא לנו equals 417, which is the combination of Adam אדם, David דוד and Messiah משיח. The three names form the acronym of Adam, the true human being. “A virtuous person is an actual offering of atonement, whereas a non-virtuous one is not, for he is defective... the tzaddiq alone is an atonement for the world” (*Zohar* 1:65b).

27:19 his wife sent to him – Regional governors had been prohibited from taking their wives with them, so she sent him a messenger.

27:19 Do not have anything to do with that just man – How did the author know about Pilate’s private conversations? There are two possibilities: Either this was pious legend, which people began to speak among themselves thus becoming part of Yeshua’s oral story, or the disciples learnt about this by the man known as “Yosef from the city of Ramata [i.e., Arimathea]” (*Matt.* 27:57). According to Luke he was a respected member of the same council that had Yeshua sentenced to death, although he being pious and had voted against it (*Luke* 23:50-51; cf. *Mark* 15:43). According to the Passion Gospel, this Yosef was a friend of both Pilate and Yeshua (*Gospel of Peter* #3). If this is accurate, it might be that he told Yeshua’s disciples about his conversations with the Roman governor. The apocryphal gospel of Nicodemus (2:1) says Pilate’s wife was a proselyte to Judaism. The word “just” also means “innocent.” Referring to Yeshua as “that just man” contrasts with the accusations of the Judean chief priests and indicates that Pilate was well aware of Yeshua’s innocence. Hence the verse “he knew that they had handed him over to him out of envy.” In Mattai’s midrashic world-view, Pilate’s wife incident serves to emphasize the fact that the governor knew he was doing wrong in carrying out this death penalty, probably felt inner guilt for it, and still did so. If later Christians blamed the Jews [as a whole] for Yeshua’s death, Mattai would respond them that the gentiles are just as guilty. Pilate and his wife also serve to portray two types of gentiles, just like the disciples and the chief priests represent two types of Jews: Not all the Jews hated Yeshua, many followed him, and not all the gentiles ignored him, some saw him as a just man.

²¹The governor answered and said, Which of the two do you want me to release for you? They said, Bar-Abba. ²²Pilate said to them, What should I do then with Yeshua who is called the Messiah? They all responded, Hang him! ²³And the governor said, Why? What crime has he committed? But they shouted even louder, Hang him! ²⁴When Pilate saw that he could not do anything about it, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this innocent man! It is your responsibility. ²⁵And all the people answered and said, His blood be upon us and upon our children!

—commentary—

27:22 They all responded, Hang him! – They wanted him to have a humiliating death. “For a hanging [corpse] is a curse of God” (*Deut. 21:23*). The Targum Yerushalmi renders, “it is excretable before God to crucify a man on a beam.” That was the way the Romans would hang him, through צליבה *tzeliva*, crucifixion.

27:24 he took water and washed his hands in front of the multitude – According to Philo and Josephus, Pilate was a cruel governor, who had sent to death hundreds of innocent Jews. Similarly, Luke narrates that on one occasion Pilate mingled the blood of some Galileans with the blood of their sacrifices (*Luke 13:1*). However, as we are dealing with a historical figure, i.e., a real person not an archenemy, we must be aware that nothing about him is entirely white or entirely black. One time the Judeans protested over his use of Temple funds to finance the building of an aqueduct. As the riot increased, Pilate ordered his troops to surround the protesters (*Antiquities 18:60-62*). However, he instructed them to use clubs instead of swords, so that things would not end up in a massacre. The Pilate described in the Gospels is consistent with his portrayal in Philo and Josephus: overall, a political enemy of the Jews whose primary job in Judea was to keep the Roman peace, and in the fulfilment of this task, he can behave sometimes gently and sometimes with cruelty. In this passage Pilate is not showing the innocence he claims to have; on the contrary, he is showing cowardice and passivity towards injustice, for he knows Yeshua is innocent and still gives him away to appease the crowd. The act of physically washing his hands would have triggered on the chief priests a Biblical imagery, as it is written, “I washed my hands in innocence” (*Psalms 73:13*). It is also written, “If a slain man be found... the priests must approach... and the elders of that city... must wash their hands over a calf... and they will say, Our hands did not shed this blood” (*Deut. 21:1-7*). For this reason the Passion Gospel says “of the Judeans, none washed their hands, neither Herod or any of his judges” (*Gospel of Peter #1*).

27:25 And all the people answered – By “all the people” the author means all the chief priests, Herodians and corrupted scribes who brought Yeshua before Pilate, together with the ignorant crowd who followed after them and were present in the trial.

27:25 His blood be upon us and upon our children – By having Pilate disassociate himself from Yeshua’s capital punishment, now it is the chief priest’s responsibility to decide whether to stop it or to see it through. Their response is emphatic: If this man is innocent, we and our children will carry the divine blame upon us. They are not cursing themselves, but accepting the responsibility that Pilate has put upon them. Their choice of words, however, turns it indeed into a self-curse. This parallels what the prophet said to the princes of Judah, “I am in your hands, do to me whatever you consider appropriate. But you should know that if you put me to death, you will bring innocent blood upon yourselves, and upon this city and upon its inhabitants, for indeed God has sent me” (*Jer. 26:14-15*). It is written, “Two nations are in your womb... and one kingdom will become mightier than the other” (*Gen. 25:23*). It means “when one rises, the other will fall” (*Megilla 6a*). By the spiritual fall that the corrupted priesthood brought upon Jerusalem, the kingdom of Rome rose in

²⁶Then he released Bar-Abba to them, and he had Yeshua flogged, and handed him over to be hanged.

²⁷The soldiers of the governor took Yeshua to the praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him, ²⁸and upon clothing him they put a scarlet robe on him,

commentary

power against them. What happened then? In the case of the chief priests, they lost their influence among the people, the house of Hanin was burned by a rebel like Bar-Abba, and Hanin himself was caught and murdered (cf. *Josephus, Wars 2:17:6-9*). As for the Herodians and the Judeans, Rome destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple, and the people of Israel were exiled into the nations. With the loss of the Temple and the support of Rome, the Sadducees simply disappeared. The aftermath is that for thousands of years the nations of the world have held the Jews accountable for having killed their messiah.

27:26 and he had Yeshua flogged – Yeshua was not merely beaten with a whip. The Greek *phragellos* (φραγελλός) and the Aramaic *pragella* (פרגללא) both refer to the whip used in a Roman flagellation, what in Latin is called a *flagellum*. It was a short whip with more than two leather thongs. The thongs were knotted with small pieces of metal or bones, intentionally designed to shred a victim's flesh while being scourged and prolong his suffering. "Bystanders were struck with awe when they saw them lacerated with scourges even to the innermost veins and arteries, so that the hidden inward parts of the body, both their bowels and their members, were exposed to view" (*Eusebius, Eccl. History 4:15*). The flagellation alone could have made Yeshua bleed to death, but if that was not enough, he was still to experience a beating, the pain of having to carry a heavy beam for a long distance, and the crucifixion itself. Although Jewish law limits the number of stripes to "no more than forty" (cf. *Deut. 25:3*), the Roman flagellation knew no limit; they could scourge Yeshua up until three hundred times, leaving his body like a living skeleton.

27:27 the praetorium – That is, the palace of Pontius Pilate, which was probably built by Herod for himself. It is usually translated as "the common hall."

27:28 upon clothing him – They stripped him for the scourging, since that was the procedure. They made him walk naked to the praetorium. Hence, in some manuscripts this phrase reads "and they stripped him," for the sake of those unfamiliar with the process, because the text does not plainly say that Yeshua at this point is naked.

27:28 put a scarlet robe on him – When the Roman soldiers learned he was going to be executed for claiming to be the king of Judea, besides torturing him they also ridiculed him with a satiric coronation ceremony. Although the Greek of Mark calls the robe "purple" (*Mark 15:17*), the word used is rare, not found in the classics, so it could denote any bright color with red tones in it. The Persic of Mark coincides with Mattai calling it "red," so what Mark meant was "crimson," meaning that both gospels use different words to depict the same color. Roman soldier robes were red indeed. The red of the robe, mimicking royal clothes (cf. *Daniel 5:29*), was of the color of blood, thus representing the sin of Israel, in the aspect of: "though your sins are like scarlet, they will be white like snow" (*Isa. 1:18*). This is why a scarlet strip of wool was tied to the Yom Kippur scapegoat (cf. *Mishna Shabbat 9:3; Shabbat 89b*).⁸ It is because, as we know, of the two identical goats of Yom Kippur, one was marked for Hashem and one for Azazel (*Lev. 16:8*). The mark of distinction was done

⁸ See also the Christian Epistle of Barnabas (7:8) where in its paraphrase of Leviticus 16 (16:8-11) it reads "place scarlet wool upon its head." The quote has more in common with a Mishnaic passage than with the actual verses in Scripture (cf. *Mishna Yoma 4:2*). These sources prove that the scarlet strip on the Yom Kippur goat was an ancient practice that predates the Talmudic era.

²⁹and platted a crown of thorns, and they put it on his head. Then they put a staff in his right hand and bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, king of the Jews! ³⁰And they spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head. ³¹After that they had mocked him, they took the robe off from him, and put his own raiment on him, and led him away to hang him. ³²As they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Shimon by name, and they forced him to carry his beam.

—commentary—

with scarlet wool (*Yoma 41b*). One goat was released and one sacrificed – notice the similarity with Yeshu Bar-Abba and Yeshua of Nazareth, also two identical goats. Ironically, the coronation ceremony carried out by the Romans was being taken seriously in the upper realms. The ones wanting to release Bar-Abba were responsible for Yeshua's exile to the nations, and the gentiles, the ones wanting to release Yeshua, were responsible for his martyrdom. But Yeshua, through this suffering, became the Messiah of the nations (*see commentary on 27:17*). This is the process of Messiah ben Yosef: before becoming the second to the king among the nations, Yosef was sent to slavery by his brothers and was imprisoned by the Egyptians.

27:29 a crown of thorns... on his head – They twisted flexible thorns so as to mock a royal diadem. The primary intention of the crown was to ridicule Yeshua, not to torture him. However, the soldiers were not preoccupied with his suffering, as the surrounding verses prove it: they flogged Yeshua, and they spit on him, and after making him wear the crown of thorns struck him on the head with a staff... etc. They took what first came to hand and did not waste time removing the prickles. And even if they did, they would not carefully remove them all. Since the thorns pierced the nerves behind the skin of Yeshua's head, he felt sharp, shooting pains and a constant, insufferable sting which could not be relieved. His head would also be inflamed. This, together with the previous flagellation, left Yeshua entirely disfigured, in the aspect of: "he had neither form nor comeliness; and we saw him that he had no appearance" (*Isa. 53:2*).

27:31 led him away to hang him – That is, to crucify him.

27:32 a man of Cyrene, Shimon by name – Mark adds that he was a passer-by who was coming from a village, or from the field, in Aramaic *qrita* קריתא (*Mark 15:21*). He also mentions he was the father of Alexander and Rufus, and although he takes for granted that his readers would know who these two men are, we do not. Any claim would be mere conjecture. Cyrene was a Romanized Greek city, and the names of his sons are both Greek. However, his name is Jewish. What we know, then, is that he was not from the Holy Land, neither Judean nor Galilean, probably neither a typical Pharisee or Sadducee. His pilgrimage to Jerusalem probably was to celebrate Passover. When it says he was coming "from the field" or "from a village," it might refer to the place where he celebrated the *Seder* or even to a place he went to pray. It is very unlikely, as some commentators suggest, that he was working in the field at that time.

27:32 and they forced him to carry his beam – Since the prisoners had to carry their own crossbeam (or *Patibulum*) outside of the city,^h the need for help denotes Yeshua was too weak to carry it on his own due to the beating he received.

—relevant quotes—

"They dressed him in crimson and sat him on the seat of judgment. They said, Judge righteously, king of Israel! One of them brought a crown of thorns and fastened it on the master's head. Some standing by were spitting in his eyes, others slapped his face, and still others stabbed him with reeds. Some also whipped him and said, This is the way to honor the son of God." (*Gospel of Peter 3:7-9*)

^h "Every criminal who goes to execution must carry his own cross on his back" (Plutarch, *De sera numinis vindicta* 9).

³³They came to a place called Golgoltha, that is to say, place of a skull,

commentary

27:33 a place called Golgoltha – The name of the place is fully spelled *Golgoltha* גולגולתא, and reduced into *Gogultha* גוגולתא (*Peshitta*) as Syriac dialects tend to drop letters. The word literally means skull, not “place of a skull.” Additionally, Mattai was originally written in a Semitic language, so if taken at face value, the explanation: “that is to say, place of a skull” could have been a scribal addition, otherwise unnecessary and mistaken. Although the place was identified by tradition as the mount we call today Mount Calvary (*derived in the 5th century from Luke 23:33*), all scholars agree there was not such a place called Golgoltha in Jerusalem in the first century. Some theologians justify its name by saying the hill resembled in shape a skull, and some theorize that it was called so because it was a place for executions. Still, there is no historical record of the location, which means the name is actually symbolic. One might wonder, which tradition is the author drawing Golgoltha from? The Christian commentator Origen searched throughout Jewish sources and oral traditions and concluded that the place was called “the skull” because Yeshua was crucified on the same spot where the skull of Adam had been buried (*Origen on Matt. n. 126, p. 13*).¹ Hence, when the text explains “that is to say, place of a skull,” it does not mean “a place of many skulls” – like it would be if the place was a known location for executions – but “the place where a specific skull was buried, and that is Adam’s skull.” Origen’s explanation was mostly mistaken, mainly because Jewish sources consistently state that Adam’s entire body is buried in Hebron, in the cave of Treasuries which is a metaphysical entrance of Gan Eden (cf. *Sotah 13a; Yovel 4:29; Pirqei d’Rabbi Eliezer ch. 20*). However, he was not entirely wrong. The information he accessed was too much for him to handle, so he misinterpreted it. In Judaism there certainly is something called “Adam’s skull,” but it is not a geographical location, nor does it refer to Adam’s physical skull. It is in fact one of the deepest teachings in Jewish mysticism.

27:33 Golgoltha – Come and see: The sefirot – God’s divine emanations – and the spiritual realms where they operate are represented in mysticism anthropomorphically, as a human (i.e., Adam). The feet of this Adam is the lowest sefirah in the sefirotic tree (*Malkhut* in the world of *Assiyah*). The head of this Adam is in the highest sefirah – *Keter*, the crown. This realm is called Adam Qadmon (the primordial man) or Adam Elyon (the Highest Adam), which is the archetype world of creation. It is a world of infinite light and infinite potential as it precedes the four worlds of creation: *Atzilut*, *Beriah*, *Yetzirah* and *Assiyah*. In the soul, it is the *Yekhida*, the collective soul of humankind. From this very world the Messiah’s soul itself descends (cf. *Bereshit Rabbah 8:1*). In this anthropomorphic language, the “skull” of Adam Qadmon is the highest sefirah within the highest sefirah – in other words, the *keter* of *keter*, which is called the skull of the Ancient One [*Atiq*], because it is at the top of the spiritual worlds. This is the meaning of what is written, “I saw something like a man coming, and he came up to the Ancient of Days and was brought before him” (*Daniel 7:13*). “The Golgoltha of the upper realm is white, lacking any blemish or defect” (*Idra Zuta 3*). This Supernal skull is full of a bright spark referred to as “dew” (*Zohar, Sifra Ditzniuta 2:6*), which provides a moisture of the Supernal Torah to the lower realms (cf. *Zohar III:129b*). It is thus written, “May God give you the dew of Heaven” (*Gen. 27:28*). It is at the cusp of this sefirotic structure, at the head of Adam Qadmon, that our prayers need to reach when we pray, for it is the realm where everything we pray about comes to life. This dew corresponds to the three letters of the Tetragrammaton – *yod, hei, vav* – whereas we, the physical world, are the fourth letter – *hei* – and as such we must strive to unite them. Hence, the Hebrew word for repentance תשובה also means תשובה “returning the Hei.” This dew will bring about the resurrection of the dead: “From this Golgoltha trickles dew to Zeir Anpin [i.e., the son], filling his head every day... ..from this dew the dead will rise as it is written (*Isa. 26:19*), [My corpses will arise] for your dew is dew of lights” (*Zohar III:128b, Idra Rabbah*). Parallel to this the Talmud says, “*Aravot* – i.e., the highest Heaven – contains righteousness, justice, charity... the souls of

¹ Jerome also mentions this tradition, although he rejects it.

³⁴and they gave him vinegar to drink mingled with gall: and having tasted it, he would not drink it.

—commentary—

the righteous, spirits and souls that are to be created, and the dew that the Blessed Holy One will use to revive the dead” (*Hagiga 12b*). During the time the body is dead and decomposing in the depths, it awaits the illumination that it will receive from the dew of lights. In our world of division the concepts of life and death exist. In Golgoltha there is eternal immortality. In the resurrection, “night will shine like the day” (*Psalms 139:12*). In other words, there will be no more darkness, no more death. For the Gnostics, the “son of man” is the light of this Adam Qadmon consciousness incarnated into our world (cf. *gospel of Judas*).

27:33 that is to say, place of a skull – Come and see: Although Yeshua was being tortured, humiliated and executed on the physical world, apparently abandoned by God, through his life of righteousness and his absolute self-nullification, giving up his life for the sake of mankind, his soul had ascended to the highest possible level of the soul, the level of the Ancient One, the Golgoltha in Adam Qadmon. Keter is the primary will, the will from eternity. By embracing this will and the truth that whatever happens is always for the best, Yeshua transcended the worlds of creation and reached a spiritual status that transcends the *tzimtzum* – contraction of light – which was experienced by humankind after the sin of Eden; that is, the separation between the upper reality and our lower world. He reached *Keter* – that is to say, he attained God’s primordial will (cf. *Liqutei Moharan 1:24*) – thus attaining the status of immortality, being impregnated with the dew of lights. And so, although Messiah ben Yosef is killed, through the aspect of answered prayer – that is, the dew of Golgoltha – he resurrects and transcends the concepts of life and death.^j He creates a new world that emerges from the status of answered prayer, from the perfect will of the Blessed Holy One, as the Talmud states, “If the righteous desired so, they could create a world” (*Sanh. 65b*). Those who know the significance of Golgoltha understand from the author that Yeshua was not abandoned as it superficially seemed. In truth, he was both transcending and changing the entire structure of reality so that humankind will get closer to the Creator.

27:34 vinegar mingled with gall – Vinegar can also be interpreted as wine. “When one is led to execution, he is given frankincense in a cup of wine to numb his senses, as it is written (*Prov. 31:6*), Give strong drink to him that is ready to perish and wine to the bitter in soul. The prominent women in Jerusalem would be usually the ones donating this drink” (*Sanhedrin 43a*). Although Mark’s version has people offering wine with myrrh to Yeshua (cf. *Mark 15:23*), Mattai uses the word gall. Gall שרף, as in *Psalms 69:22*, refers to a poisonous herb. See in *Iyov*, “He will suck the poison שרף of cobras” (*Iyov 20:16*). It seems their intention was to quicken Yeshua’s death or to cause him a loss of consciousness. This choice of words causes a parallelism with *Psalms 69*, “They put poison into my nourishment and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink” (*Psalms 69:22*). Not surprisingly, the fourth gospel uses *Psalms 69* in its version of the story, making Yeshua literally claim, “I am thirsty” (*John 19:28*).

^j “When Messiah ben Yosef is killed, through prayer he is brought back and lives” (*Megalleh Amuqot al haTorah 72a*).

³⁵And they hanged him, and divided his clothes by casting lots.³⁶And sitting down they kept watching over him ³⁷and placed over his head the written charge against him, THIS IS YESHUA THE KING OF THE JEWS. ³⁸There were two thieves hanged together with him, one on the right hand, and another on the left.

—commentary—

27:35 And they hanged him – Seneca writes, “I see crosses there, not just of one kind, but made in many different ways: some have their victims with head down to the ground, some impale their private parts; others stretch out their arms on the gibbet” (*Seneca, Moral Essays 6:20:3*). The most common form was a simple wooden beam in the form of a T.^k Mattai obviates that Yeshua had been nailed at the stake by his wrists and feet with nails of brass (cf. *Luke 24:38-40; Gos. Peter 6:21; John 20:25; Col. 2:14*). This parallels the alternative reading of Psalm 22:16, “A gang of evildoers has encircled me, כָּאֲרוּ they pierced my hands and my feet” (*Psalm 22:16 as in some Masoretic mms. [See Hayim Ibn Adoniyah on this], in the Dead Sea Psalm 22 and in many LXX mms.*).

27:35 and divided his clothes by casting lots – Those crucified were left without clothes (cf. *Josephus, Ant. 19:270*). This is one of a few elements in the story paralleling Psalm 22, as it is written “They share my garments among themselves and cast lots for my raiment” (*Psalm 22:19*).

27:37 THIS IS YESHUA THE KING OF THE JEWS – This title (in Latin *titulus*) was meant to be understood as a mockery of Yeshua’s reason to be executed; a crime of sedition of which there was no evidence. It certainly offended the high priests (cf. *John 19:21*). Every gospel has a slightly different form of the title: In the Passion Gospel it says, “THIS IS THE KING OF ISRAEL” (*G. Peter 4:11*); Mark contains the shortest form: “THE KING OF THE JEWS” (*Mark 15:26*); in Luke it says, “THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS” (*Luke 23:38*). The fourth gospel says that Pilate wrote, “YESHUA OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS” in three languages: Hebrew, Latin and Greek (*John 19:19-20*). The famous INRI acronym which we find in Christian tradition is not found in the gospels; it is, however, derived from the fourth gospel version in Latin: *Jesus Nazarenus Rex Iudaeum* (Yeshua Nazarene, King of the Judeans). Rather than discrepancy, the variants in each gospel actually testify of the inscription’s historical veracity, as each one is an independent witness.

27:38 hanged with him, one on the right hand, and another on the left – Mattai is both drawing parallels between Yeshua’s execution and Biblical verses and portraying him in a sefirotic structure. This probably goes unnoticed to the uninitiated, but for those who are learned in Jewish mysticism, the parallels are simply striking. We can tell this is certainly the case as we study how Yeshua’s crucifixion evolved throughout the oral tradition. By the time Luke wrote about it, the thieves on the left and on the right were given their corresponding sefirotic roles. Come and see: The sefirot – God’s divine attributes – emanate in the form of a *mishqal* or balance scale, with a left column, a right column and a middle column. At the top of Golgotha, Yeshua is positioned in the middle, between two thieves. The left column corresponds to the attribute of strength, so it is called *Din* (judgment). This is the thief on the left who kept judging Yeshua, even though they were both in the same condition, “Are you not the Messiah?” (*Luke 23:39*). The right column of the sefirot represents benevolence, so it is called *Hessed* (lovingkindness). This is the thief on the right who in the last moment repents and finds affinity with Yeshua, “Master, remember me when you come in your kingdom” (*Luke 23:42*). The middle pillar, represented by Yeshua here, corresponds to the perfect harmony between the two and is called *Tiferet* (beauty), *Emet* (truth) and *Rahamim* (merciful judgment). This is Yeshua praying for them, “Father, forgive them, because they do not know what they are doing” (*Luke 23:34*). It is taught in Kabbalah that from the Golgotha, the skull of the crown, the lower concepts of separation, of

^k cf. Clayton F. Bower Jr., *Cross or Torture Stake?*

³⁹Those who passed by reviled him, shaking their heads, ⁴⁰saying, You, who destroys the temple and builds it in three days, save yourself. If you are the son of God, come down from the tree! ⁴¹Also the chief priests mocked him, together with the scribes and elders, and said, ⁴²He saved others, but he cannot save himself. If he is the king of Israel, let him now come down from the tree and we will believe him. ⁴³He trusts in God; let him rescue him now if he wants him: for he said, I am the son of God. ⁴⁴The thieves who were hanged with him also heaped insults on him. ⁴⁵Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour. ⁴⁶And about the ninth hour Yeshua cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabaqthani?

commentary

left and right, of masculine and feminine emanate, but the middle pillar of the tree unites them all (cf. *Zohar III:97a*).

27:39 Those who passed by reviled him – In the aspect of, “All who see me will mock me; they will open their lips, they will shake their head” (*Psalms 22:8*). This section contains some noticeable parallels with the second chapter of Wisdom (cf. *Wisdom 2:10-20*). Just like Yeshua was put to death by being hanged, the wicked men say about the tzaddiq, “Let us condemn him to a disgraceful death, for according to what he says he will be protected” (*Wis. 2:10*). The passers-by yell, “If you are the son of God, come down from the tree!” (v. 40). In wisdom the wicked say about the righteous, “He calls himself a son of the Lord... boasts that God is his father” (*Wis. 2:13, 16*). The chief priests say, “He trusts in God; let him rescue him” (v. 43), as it is written in Psalm 22, “He will save him because he delights in him” (*Psalms 22:9*). In Wisdom they say, “If the righteous is God’s son, he will help him and deliver him from the hand of his adversaries” (*Wis. 2:18*). The thieves also insult him (v. 44), and in Wisdom they say, “Let us test him with insults and torture” (*Wis. 2:19*). Finally, the crowd thinks that Yeshua is calling to Eliyahu with his last breath (v. 49), and in Wisdom they say, “Let us test what will happen at the end of his life” (*Wis. 2:17*). Worth noticing that Wisdom 2 derives these concepts from Isaiah (52-53) and Psalm 22. For more on the book of Wisdom see also commentary on Matt. 20:19.

27:44 The thieves ... also heaped insults on him – This is according to Mattai and Mark. In the tradition recorded by both the Passion gospel and Luke, the thief on the right hand was ultimately convinced of Yeshua’s innocence and spoke in his favor (cf. *Luke 23:40-42; Peter 4:13*). See above commentary on Matt. 27:38.

27:45 there was darkness over all the land – As it is written, “Darkness will cover the land, and thick darkness the people, but Hashem will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you” (*Isa. 60:2*). The darkness is followed by silence and confusion. Many in the crowd thought the sun had already set while he was still hanging, which is a Torah violation, making them all realize something wrong was being done (cf. *G. Peter 5:15*). For three hours nothing happened. Then Yeshua himself broke that silence. This darkness, whether literal or symbolic, was also the reason Yeshua exclaimed. See third commentary on verse 46.

27:46 about the ninth hour – Mark says that it was on the third hour of the morning when Yeshua was hanged. Since Jews counted the hours of the day beginning from sunrise (which averagely takes place around six in the morning according to our modern count), the third hour would be equivalent to our modern nine o’clock. At the sixth hour there was darkness; this was about midday, like the Passion gospel says, “It was midday but darkness engulfed the whole of Judea” (*G. Peter 5:15*). The ninth hour equals three in the afternoon. Yeshua had been hanging on the beam for six hours.

⁴⁶saying, Eli, Eli, lama azavtani?

—commentary—

27:46 Yeshua cried with a loud voice – According to Mattai and Mark Yeshua kept silent for the entire ‘Passion’ narrative. The Passion gospel also emphasizes that Yeshua did not speak one word during the execution (cf. *G. Peter 4:10*). However, earliest accounts say that Yeshua cried out with a loud voice twice. With the passing of time, later gospels added more words into Yeshua’s mouth. In both Luke and in the fourth gospel Yeshua is registered saying three sentences instead of two. However, the sentences are totally different in each gospel, making theologians believe that Yeshua said a total of seven sentences while on the cross (cf. *Luke 23:34, 43, 46; John 19:26, 28, 30*). But historically speaking, it is very unlikely that he said all those words attributed to him: Let us not forget his body had been flagellated – to such an extent that someone else had to carry his cross – and he had been hanged for six hours with nails pierced on his wrists. While hanging, his body weight would pull down on his diaphragm and chest, and in order to inhale, he would have to pull himself up using his nailed hands or feet, causing a traumatic pain and shock. This explains why he died faster than other criminals who were not flagellated or were tied with ropes instead of nailed. He would have died either by blood loss or asphyxia, which means it was very painful and difficult for him to utter a word, let alone have all those conversations on the cross. On the exception of Mattai’s sentences, all the other phrases should be understood as midrashic or theological material rather than actual words recorded by a historian. This can be proven by following the evolution of the two thieves’ testimony: In Mark and Mattai the two thieves are among the crowd that revile Yeshua. In the Passion gospel, one of the thieves judges Yeshua while the other defends him, but Yeshua keeps silent (cf. *G. Peter 4:10-13*). Then in Luke’s gospel not only the second thief defends Yeshua; he also repents, to which Yeshua responds: “Amen I say to you today you will be with me in Paradise” (cf. *Luke 23:46*). The phrase is a clear theological development. On how the crucifixion mirrors a sefirotic column structure, read above commentary on Matt. 27:38.

27:46 Eli, Eli, lama azavtani? – Greek manuscripts include a translation of the phrase. Most Hebrew and Aramaic manuscripts (cf. *Peshitta, Old Syriac, DuTillet, ShemTov.. etc*) obviate a translation; otherwise, it would be absurdly redundant. The Greek mms. needed to keep the phrase in its original language, otherwise the readers would not understand why the crowd thought he was calling for Eliyah. Also, the Greek transliteration “*Lama Sabaqtani*” is a mixture of Hebrew and Aramaic. *Lama* למה is Hebrew whereas *Sabaqtani* שבקתני is Aramaic. The correct Hebrew phrase should be “*Lama Azavtani*” למה עזבתני, and if in Aramaic, it should be “*Lemana Sabaqtani*” למנא שבקתני. However, the phenomenon only occurs in Greek manuscripts, not in the Semitic ones. Since he is quoting Scripture, it is likely that he uttered the phrase entirely in Hebrew (cf. *Psalms 22:2; Megillah 15b*). However, some theologians theorize that perhaps Mattai was using, not Scriptural, but first century Hebrew (i.e., Mishnaic Hebrew), which borrows many foreign words, especially from Aramaic. Mark’s transliteration is consistently Aramaic: *Elahi, Elahi, Lema Sabaqtani?* (*Mark 27:46*). However, it is hard to understand why people would think he was calling to Eliyah. We, therefore, conclude that Mattai has the most accurate version, and that Yeshua spoke in Hebrew the entire phrase.

27:46 Eli, Eli, lama azavtani? – The sentence is from Psalm 22, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (*Psalms 22:2*). This is a prophetic song which king David wrote for Israel in times of exile (cf. *Rashi*). In the Psalm, Israel is called the deer of dawn, as it is written, “For the conductor, concerning *ayalet haShakhar*, אילת השחר the deer of dawn” (*Psalms 22:1*). Because, although surrounded by darkness, the deer expects the light of dawn. The sages call queen Esther by this name because of the distress she felt when the Jews were about to be annihilated. As queen Esther entered a chamber with idols, the Shekhina abandoned her. i.e., since she was in such a place, she no longer was able to feel God’s presence. She immediately said, אלי אלי למה עזבתני “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (*Megillah 15b*). God’s name *El* אל (lit. Strength) is a call for the attribute of compassion, because you would not say to the attribute of judgment “why have you forsaken me” (*Mekhilta d’Rabbi Yishmael on Exod. 15:2*). This cry parallels the three days of fasting that

⁴⁷Some of them that stood there, when they heard that, said, This man is calling for Eliyah. ⁴⁸Immediately, one of them ran and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a spear and gave him to drink. ⁴⁹The rest said, Let him alone, let us see if Eliyah comes to save him. ⁵⁰When Yeshua had cried again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. ⁵¹And, behold, the veil of the Temple was torn in two from the top to the bottom; and the earth shook, and the rocks were split;

—commentary—

Esther ordered for the Jews (*Esther 4:16*). As the midrash explains, She called for mercy on the first two days: Eli, Eli (my strength, my strength). “On the third day she cried out with a loud voice and said, Why have you forsaken me?” (*Midrash Tehilim 22:3*). Mattai narrates that there was darkness over all the land. Immediately after, Yeshua cries “Eli, Eli, why have you forsaken me?” This makes Yeshua a “deer of dawn.” It is his cry for deliverance as he was going to die for three days and was going to be spiritually exiled from among the Jews for two thousand years.

27:48 one of them ran and took a sponge – The Passion gospel says the drink was a mixture, like in the first time (cf. *G. Peter 5:16*). As explained above (cf. *Matt. 27:34*), it was mingled with gall, which is poisonous; it would numb one’s sensations and eventually kill him. The sudden reaction to Yeshua’s words, i.e., immediately giving him the mingled vinegar – or sour wine – as soon as he spoke, was to silence him. This is the reason the others say, Let him alone, let us see.... In other words, “Do not silence him, let him speak and let us see what happens.”

27:50 When Yeshua had cried again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit – The way Mattai narrates Yeshua’s death – i.e., he commits his spirit – tells us which phrase Yeshua said before dying. A Jew usually recites the Shema before dying, or before falling asleep. Yeshua was being suffocated so it was very hard for him to speak, except perhaps in his own mind, so instead, he recited: “Into your hand I commit my spirit” (*Psalm 31:6*), which is actually recorded in Luke (*23:46*). A Torah sage who is falling asleep does not need to recite the entire Shema [because he is always engaged in Torah]. “However, he needs to recite at least one verse of prayer, such as, Into your hand I commit my spirit” (*Berakhot 5a*). This is, as it is written, “The spirit returns to God who gave it” (*Eccl. 12:7*). Yeshua cried in a loud voice because that was the only possible way he had to speak, given the circumstances. However, by doing so, he lost all the remaining air he had left and, not being able to breathe back in, he died.

27:51 the veil of the Temple was torn in two... and the rocks were split – When a righteous person dies, the way Heaven mourns for him is by causing unnatural events: When Rabbi Abbahu’s soul went to rest, the pillars of Caesarea [his city] ran with [tear-like] water. When Rabbi Yossei died, the gutters of Tzippori flowed with blood... When Rabbi Asi died, all the trees were uprooted [in a storm]. When Rabbi Hiya died, stones of fire fell from the firmament” (*Moed Qatan 25b*). “During Shimon haTzaddiq’s lifetime, the fire on the altar [at the Temple] steadily increased by only adding two logs of wood in the morning. After Shimon haTzaddiq passed away, the fire weakened and they had to add wood all day long” (*Yerushalmi Yoma 6:3*). All the oral traditions imply the veil tore at the very same moment Yeshua passed away (cf. *Mark 15:37-38; Luke 23:45-46*). Most Christian theologians suggest that the veil that was torn is the veil that separates the ‘Qodesh’ (the Holy Place) from the ‘Qodesh Qodashim’ (the Holy of Holies), then claiming that Yeshua’s death gives us access to the Divine Presence. Beautiful as it sounds, we have records from Josephus and from the Talmud itself that about forty years prior to its destruction, the Temple became to have an erratic behavior as an omen of its imminent destruction (cf. *Josephus, Wars 6:5:3 [288]*). “Forty years prior to the destruction of the

⁵²and graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose,

commentary

Temple, the lot [in the Name] did not arise in the [high priest's] right hand at all, the crimson thread [of the goat sent to Azazel] did not turn white [i.e., forgiveness was not being granted], and the westernmost lamp did not burn. The [heavy] doors of the Sanctuary opened by themselves [inviting the entrance of enemies]" (*Yoma 39b*; cf. *Yerushalmi Yoma 6:3*). Just like the other signs registered in the Talmud, Mattai's sign of the veil being rent in the middle was for everybody to see and fear. It was, therefore, the outer veil, "the veil of the Jerusalem Temple" (*G. Peter 5:19*), not the inner curtain. The only written testimony of this (besides the gospels) is the Testament of Levi, which claims the veil was torn "so that the shameful behavior of the priests no longer would be concealed" (*T. Levi 10:3*). It is assumed the Testament of Levi was written between the 1st and 2nd centuries c.e.^l Nevertheless, the destruction of the Temple had already been foretold by Yeshua himself and by other Jewish authors, like Hanokh: "And I look up until he folded up the old house, and they removed all the pillars..." (*Enoch 90:28*). Concerning the inner curtain that separated the Sanctuary from the Holy of Holies, it was cut with a sword by the Roman commander Titus in the year 70 c.e., on the day he desecrated and destroyed the Temple. A miracle occurred and the curtain spurted blood (cf. *Gittin 56b*; *Bahya on Devarim 32:38*; cf. *Josephus, Wars 6:4:7*). As opposed to the majority reading, the Gospel according to the Hebrews reads that "the lintel of the Temple, of wondrous size, collapsed [due to the earthquake], splitting in half" (*GN 21*; cf. *Jerome, Hedibia 120:8*). If the lintel was holding the Temple's veil, then there is really no contradiction.

27:52 and graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which sleep arose – This is a unique passage in Mattai with midrashic undertones. Just like the sermon on the Mount is a unique-to-Mattai midrashic setting, the resurrection of saints only happens in Mattai as well. It brings Yeshua's righteousness to its climax, emulating in a larger scale what the bones of Elisha did to a corpse when it fell on his tomb. Elisha's holiness brought it back to life (cf. *2Kings 13:21*). Similarly, Yeshua's final sacrifice elevated him to the Golgoltha, bringing dew from Heaven, causing saints to resurrect in Jerusalem. It must be noticed that, according to majority readings, this incident did not happen as soon as Yeshua died, but an unspecified time after Yeshua's own resurrection. It could be Mattai's way of saying the eschatological *Tekhiat haMeitim* – the arising of the dead – does not happen all at once, but on stages.^m First Messiah, then the saints at Jerusalem, then the righteous, and finally the wicked. On the other hand, the author is silent about what occurs to those who rose up afterwards. Did they die again? Did they receive a glorified immortal body like Yeshua? Were they seen physically? Were they seen as ghosts or in visions? Mattai does not bother to explain these details because whether the incident was historical or pious legend is irrelevant. The point he wants to make is that Yeshua became, as Paul puts it, the first-fruit of those who sleep... for as in Adam all die, so in Messiah will all be made alive" (*1Cor. 15:22-23*).

relevant quotes

"Rabba sat before Rabbi Nahman. He saw him going to sleep... Rabba said to him, Appear to me, master, in a dream. He appeared to him. Rabba asked, Did you, master, suffer pains [when you died]? Rabbi Nahman said to him, It was like removing a hair out of a glass of milk" (***Moed Qatan 28a***)

^l Although our current manuscripts of the Testament of Levi are in Greek, and it is assumed to be the original language, similar texts have been found at Qumran and there is a possibility that an earlier version existed in Aramaic. Regardless, scholars assume that its predictions about the destruction of the Temple are seen retrospectively.

^m See *Hilkhot Teshuva* chapter 8, where Maimonides similarly states Resurrection will occur on stages.

⁵³and came out of the graves after his resurrection and went into the holy city, and appeared to many. ⁵⁴Now when the centurion and those with him who were watching Yeshua saw the earthquake and those things that took place, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the son of God. ⁵⁵And many women were there beholding from a distance. They had followed Yeshua from Galilee, to care for his needs: ⁵⁶Among them were Miriam Magdalit, and Miriam the mother of Yaaqov and Yosef, and the mother of the sons of Zavdai.

commentary

27:53 and appeared to many – Talmudic and midrashic stories also relate that departed saints were seen by people both in dreams and physically. Mattai’s remark that saints from Jerusalem were seen alive finds a haunting echo in the tale of Honi haMe’agel, a figure who might have lived about the 1st century BCE. The aggadah tells a story of how he slept (meaning, he passed away) and awoke seven decades later.ⁿ When he returned home, he said “I am Honi haMe’agel, but the descendants of his family did not believe him.” He then went to the Synagogue, but the sages were just as skeptic as his family was. Overwhelmed by the weight of an unfamiliar world who did not recognize him, he pleaded for mercy and died (cf. *Taanit 23a*). Christian legends also speak of certain saints who arose from the dead, such as the sons of Shimon the elder, the man who blessed the infant Yeshua at the Temple (cf. *Luke 2:25*), the tombs of his sons were found empty, and they were seen in Arimathea engaged in constant prayer (cf. *Gospel of Nicodemus, Part II:1 [17:1]*).

27:54 this was the son of God – For the Romans who had been torturing him a verdict emerged: the chief priests were wrong, for he was not merely claiming to be son of God, but he was indeed the son of God, a saint, the Messiah of the Jews. The seismic tremors and the celestial portents that took place were undeniable evidence of Divine discontent. They thought: Heaven is angry because we killed the innocent.

relevant quotes

“Then the Judeans, with the sages and priests realized what sort of evil they had been brought upon themselves, and began to mourn, Woe to us for our sins! The judgment and the end of Jerusalem are looming!” (*Gospel of Peter 6:25*)

“Messiah our righteousness has departed from us: horror has seized us and we have no one to justify us. He has borne the yoke of our iniquities and our transgression, and is wounded because of our transgressions. He bore our sins on his shoulder, that he may find pardon for our iniquities. By his wounds we will be healed. At the time, the Eternal will create him anew. O bring up from the circle of the earth, raise him up from Se’ir [i.e., Rome], to assemble us the second time on mount Levanon by the hand of Yinon” (*Siddur: Musaf Prayer for Yom Kippur*)

ⁿ An alternative version of the story appears in Midrash Tehilim (126:1), in which it is not clear whether the tzaddiq who sleeps for seventy years is Honi haMe’agel of Rabbi Yohanan. The former is mentioned immediately after the story, and the later is mentioned immediately before. During the story, only the adjective “tzaddiq” is used, causing the ambiguity.

⁵⁷When the evening approached, there came a rich man from Ramata, named Yosef, who was also a disciple of Yeshua. ⁵⁸He went to Pilate, and begged Yeshua's body. Then Pilate ordered that it be given to him. ⁵⁹And when Yosef had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth ⁶⁰and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock, and he rolled a great stone to the entrance of the sepulchre, and left. ⁶¹And there was Miriam Magdalit, and the other Miriam, sitting over against the sepulchre.

⁶²Now the next day, that followed the day of the preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate, ⁶³saying, Sir, we remember that while he was still alive, that deceiver said, After three days I will rise again. ⁶⁴Therefore, command that the sepulchre to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise his disciples may come by night and steal him away, and say to the people, He is risen from the dead. This last error would be worse than the first.

commentary

27:57 a rich man from Ramata – Ramata is Arimathea. See second commentary on Matt. 27:19.

27:60 rolled a great stone to the entrance of the sepulchre, and left – The stone is what we call a גולל *golal*, one that rolls and covers the entire entrance of the cave. It was too heavy for one person alone to move it, so he had assistance from Roman soldiers (cf. *Matt. 27:66; G. Peter 8:31*). Also, other Jews may have assisted with the wrapping of the body (cf. *John 19:39-40*). It was done in order to preserve the body from desecration and from being eaten by beasts. Why did he depart later on? Because Shabbat was about to start. If the chronology is accurate, this took place in the eve of Shabbat, which was also the day after the Passover dinner. "We do not delay the burial of a person" (*Beitza 6a*), but if his death happens on a Yom Tov or right before Shabbat, minimal preparations to preserve the integrity and dignity of the corpse are expected. These preparations include wrapping the body and moving it to the tomb (cf. *Beitza 6a; Qitzur Shukhan Arukh, ch. 200:1*).^o In Yeshua's case, all the other funerary practices were postponed for after Shabbat (cf. *Mark 16:1; Luke 23:56*).

27:62 the next day, that followed the day of preparation – The day of preparation is Friday, when Jews prepare for Shabbat (cf. *Josephus, Antiquities 14:10 [16:163]; cf. Luke 23:54*). The day after the preparation day is a euphemism for Shabbat.

27:62 the chief priests and Pharisees – This is the only time the Pharisees are mentioned in the Passion chapter. As speculated by some scholars, Pharisees wanting to kill Yeshua for preaching a Pharisaic doctrine makes no sense. Only the chief priests and scribes were directly involved in Yeshua's execution, not the Pharisees. Perhaps historical memory has been distorted and the actual group were the Sadducees, not the Pharisees (cf. *Hyam Maccoby, Jesus the Pharisee, ch. 10, p. 125*). Here they only appear to prevent what they consider to be another possible tumult. Regardless, we have explained previously the presence of Pharisees from the Erev Rav and from among the Herodians.

^o Although some modern commentators may disagree, there are varying opinions throughout the literature. This was permitted back then, and even today it is registered as the valid halakha in the *Sulkhan Arukh* (Laws of burial on Yom Tov).

⁶⁵Pilate said to them, You have a watch. Go your way, make it as secure as you can. ⁶⁶So they went, and made the sepulchre secure by sealing the stone and posting the guard.

—commentary—

27:66 So they went, and made the sepulchre secure – The sealing of the stone was done by applying clay or mortar around the edges of the stone and affixing an official wax seal on it (cf. *Josh. 10:18; Dan. 6:17*). Since in Mattai's version the sealing is done after the preparation day, some scholars tend to believe that perhaps the chief priests desecrated Shabbat. However, in verse 66 they are asking Pilate for someone else to do it for them. The guards that protected the sepulchre were Roman soldiers, gentiles, sent by Pilate (cf. *Matt. 27:64; 28:12, 14*). The text heavily implies the sealing was done by the guards themselves and the wax seal was that of Pontius Pilate. Otherwise, there was no need for the chief priests to ask for permission in the first place. If they disregarded Shabbat they could have sent the Temple guards instead of Roman soldiers. In opposition to Mattai's chronology, the Passion Gospel places this incident on the eve of Shabbat: "Pilate granted them the centurion Petronius with his men to guard the tomb. The elders and scribes went there with them. They all rolled a great stone and placed it at the entrance of the tomb... and when Shabbat was dawning, a crowd came from Jerusalem and the surrounding area to see the sealed tomb" (*Gospel of Peter 8:31-34*). We conclude, therefore, that in both versions of the story the chief priests avoid doing *melakha* on Shabbat.