




# The Gospel of Mark

A Living Word Independent Bible Study



# The Gospel of Mark

## Part 41

### Mark 15:21-32

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# Mark 15:21-32

(NIV)

## INTRODUCTION

Our last session ended with the simple sentence:  
“Then they led him out to crucify him.”

All that Jesus has said and done have led to this moment.

His teaching about the kingdom of God and his prophetic criticism of how the Jewish leadership has handled their responsibility has led to their official condemnation.

Their guilty verdict has led to Jesus being handed over to Pilate, who shrewdly accomplishes his own political ends by agreeing to have Jesus crucified.

After merciless emotional abuse from the Roman military troops, Jesus will now be crucified.

Although the verse in today's lesson are often grouped under the heading “The Crucifixion”, we will see that the crucifixion itself is only referred to in the sparsest of terms.

## Mark 15:21 (NIV)

A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross.

“A certain man from Cyrene”

Simon is not a local, and is just arriving from the outlying environs.

Cyrene was located in modern Libya, on the Mediterranean coast.



<https://sites.google.com/a/desertsunlimitedatonement.com/desert-sun/desert-sun/jesus-death-resurrection-ascension/122---the-crucifixion>

## Mark 15:21 (NIV)

A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross.

“forced him to carry the cross”

Probably, because Jesus was too weak.

Roman soldiers were allowed to press anyone into a necessary service at a moment’s notice.

“father of Alexander and Rufus”

We might ask why these men are mentioned by name?

The only other “Rufus” in the New Testament is in

Romans:

Romans 16:13 – “Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother, who has been a mother to me, too.”

Mark’s Gospel MAY have been composed in Rome.

There is speculation that these two men may have been known to Christians in Rome, which is why Mark mentions them and their relationship to Simon of Cyrene.

## Mark 15:22 (NIV)

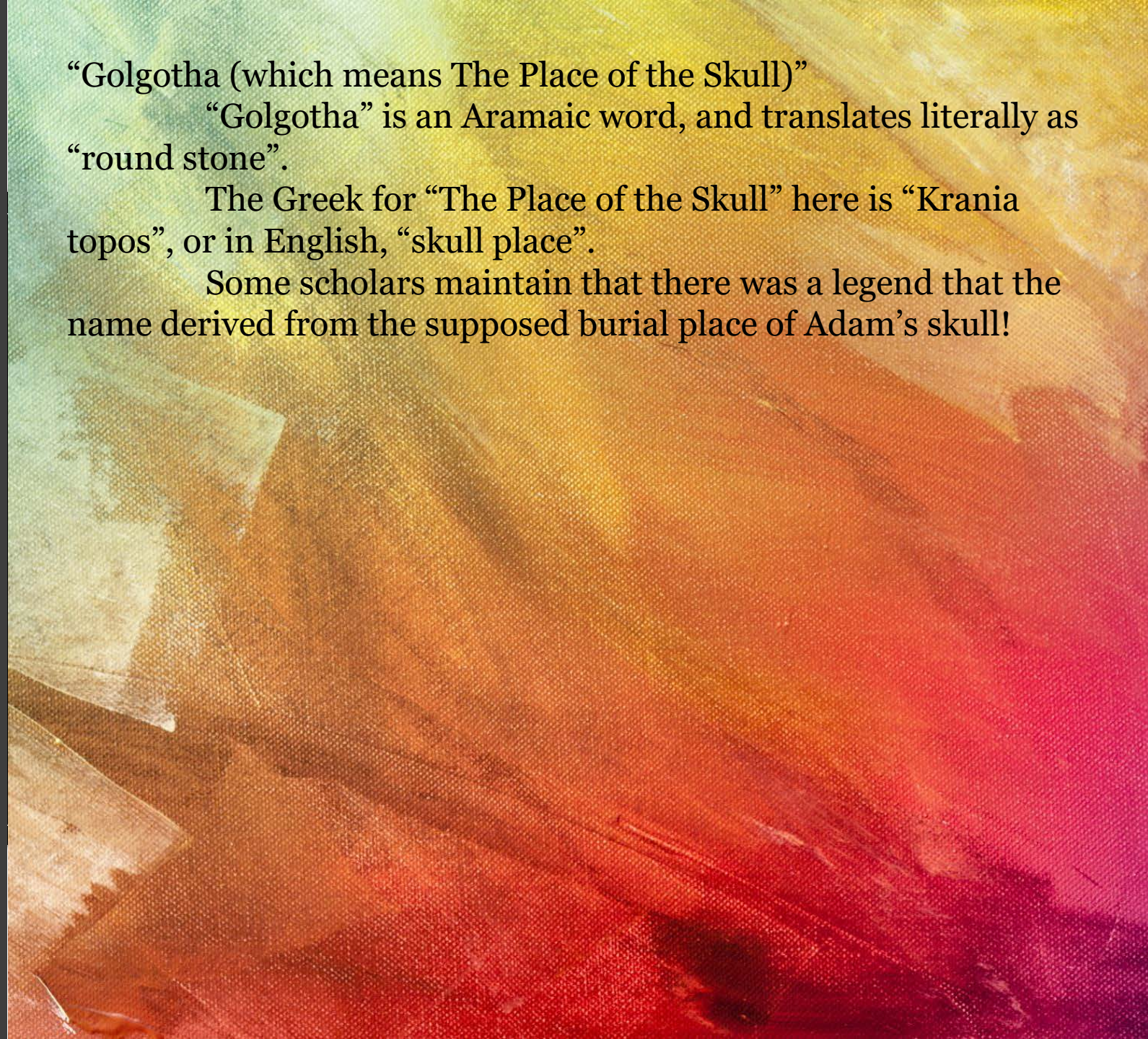
They brought Jesus to  
the place called  
Golgotha (which means  
The Place of the Skull).

“Golgotha (which means The Place of the Skull)”

“Golgotha” is an Aramaic word, and translates literally as “round stone”.

The Greek for “The Place of the Skull” here is “Krania topos”, or in English, “skull place”.

Some scholars maintain that there was a legend that the name derived from the supposed burial place of Adam’s skull!



## Mark 15:23 (NIV)

Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it.

“wine mixed with myrrh”

A Jewish proverb may have occasioned such an act:

Proverbs 31:6 – “Give beer to those who are perishing, wine to those who are in anguish.”

There is actually no evidence that myrrh had any analgesic properties, so it was probably NOT offered to dull the pain.

More likely, this is on-going mocking – wine mixed with myrrh was considered a delicacy.

The act may be akin to saying, “Here, king, have a nicely spiced wine!”

In Matthew’s and Luke’s Gospels, though, the substance offered is not myrrh, but “gall” and “vinegar”.

Matthew 27:34 – “There they offered Jesus wine to drink, mixed with gall; but after tasting it, he refused to drink it.”

Luke 23:36 – “The soldiers came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar”

This would still comport with the idea of mockery, replacing the actual fine spice in the drink with a bitter gall or vinegar.

## Mark 15:23 (NIV)

Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it.

“but he did not take it”

Jesus again refuses to participate in any mockery.

Although there are other theories as to why he would not drink it:

1) He had vowed to abstain from wine until the kingdom came in full

Mark 14:25 – “I tell you the truth, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it anew in the kingdom of God.”

2) He did not want to dull his senses (this assumes the mixture DID have analgesic properties).

3) Drinking on the Jewish Day of Atonement was forbidden.

It is not Yom Kippur, it is the Passover – but this assumes Jesus understood his crucifixion as an act of sacrificial atonement. Therefore, Jesus would not drink wine on this day.



# Mark 15:24 (NIV)

And they crucified him.  
Dividing up his clothes,  
they cast lots to see  
what each would get.

“And they crucified him”

Mark gives only a simple statement of the event itself.

We must note well the restraint shown by Mark and ALL of the Gospel writers.

They COULD have presented Jesus’ suffering and death in a graphic, gruesome, brutal, and sickening fashion – crucifixion was ALL of these things.

BUT, they chose to take a very disciplined approach, not even really hinting at the details of the pain and agony.

We do need to be informed about the reality and the brutality and the horrible death brought about by crucifixion.

But we also need to recognize that the Gospel writers intentionally CHOSE not to go down this road!

This is true of both the flogging AND the crucifixion.

**THIS IS SIGNIFICANT!**

They are NOT interested in arousing pity for Jesus in his suffering.

Rather, they are calling us to turn to Jesus based upon WHO HE IS and the basic fact that he died for us, because he loves us.

# Mark 15:24 (NIV)

And they crucified him.  
Dividing up his clothes,  
they cast lots to see  
what each would get.

“And they crucified him” (continued)

We must also not make the mistake of assuming ancient writers would not write in graphic, gruesome terms.

See 4 Maccabees for an account of the kind of language they COULD have used ... be advised, it's graphic:

4 Maccabees 9:19-25 – “While he was saying these things, they spread fire under him, and while fanning the flames they tightened the wheel further. The wheel was completely smeared with blood, and the heap of coals was being quenched by the drippings of gore, and pieces of flesh were falling off the axles of the machine. Although the ligaments joining his bones were already severed, the courageous youth, worthy of Abraham, did not groan, but as though transformed by fire into immortality he nobly endured the rackings. "Imitate me, brothers," he said. "Do not leave your post in my struggle or renounce our courageous brotherhood. Fight the sacred and noble battle for religion. Thereby the just Providence of our ancestors may become merciful to our nation and take vengeance on the accursed tyrant." When he had said this, the saintly youth broke the thread of life.”

“divided up his clothes”

See Psalm 22:

Psalm 22:18 – “They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.”

This was customary with crucifixion victims.

“cast lots”

Probably NOT dice, but a guessing game – it would be doubtful that they would have dice with them.

# Mark 15:25-26

(NIV)

It was the third hour when they crucified him. The written notice of the charge against him read: **THE KING OF THE JEWS.**

“the third hour”

This means 9:00 AM.

John’s Gospel says it was the sixth hour (noon).

This was probably done by John to align with the time when the Passover lambs were beginning to be slaughtered.

“written notice of the charge”

This refers to what was known as the **TITULUS**. It was a sign posted which stated the reason for the punishment.

John tell us it was posted in three languages:

John 19:19-20 – “Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: **JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS**. Many of the Jews read this sign, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin, and Greek.”

Mark does not tell us **WHERE** the titulus was placed.

Matthew says it was above Jesus’ head:

Matthew 27:37 – “Above his head they placed the written charge against him: **THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS.**”

This is a large part of why Jesus is typically portrayed as being crucified on a “plus sign” cross, rather than a “T cross” or an “X cross”, both of which were also common.

These types did not have a place for a titulus above the head. Further, the “X cross” was not usually carried, but a fixed installation.

# Mark 15:27- (28) (NIV)

They crucified two robbers with him, one on his right and one on his left.

“two robbers”

“Rebels” might be a better translation.

We do not know who they were – but, plausibly, they were associates of Barabbas.

Some manuscripts have a verse 28 following this verse:

Mark 15:28 – “and the scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘He was counted with the lawless ones.’”

This verse points to the fulfillment of Isaiah 53:12 through Jesus’ grouping with these robbers in crucifixion:

Isaiah 53:12 – “Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.”

The lack of this verse in the most ancient manuscripts of Mark’s Gospel call its originality in the Gospel into question, and it is therefore not included in most modern translations, except in a footnote.

# Mark 15:29-30

(NIV)

Those who passed by  
hurled insults at him,  
shaking their heads and  
saying, “So! You who  
are going to destroy the  
temple and build it in  
three days, come down  
from the cross and save  
yourself!”

“those who passed by”

The Roman convention was that criminals were crucified in very public places – even along major thoroughfares.

Golgotha was likely along a major road.

“hurled insults ... shaking their heads:

The words Mark uses are clearly meant to evoke Psalm 22:

Psalm 22:7 – “All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads.”

The words “hurled insults at him” are, literally, “were blaspheming him”.

Mark’s intentional irony is on display here – Jesus, wrongly accused of blasphemy, is being blasphemed himself.

“You who are going to destroy the temple”

Apparently, the accusations made in the trial before the Sanhedrin have made the rounds.

## Mark 15:31 (NIV)

In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves. “He saved others,” they said, “but he can’t save himself!”

“mocked him among themselves”

Again, these leaders think they have won.

Jesus’ claims seem ludicrous now.

The danger he posed is past – they can safely poke fun at him now.

“He saved others, but he can’t save himself”

The words are meant to make the crowds question Jesus’ claims – if, perhaps, the rumors of his saving words are in fact untrue.

The leaders believe Jesus’ inability to save himself will invalidate these claims.

## Mark 15:32 (NIV)

“Let this Christ, this King of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe.” Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

“Let this Christ, this King of Israel, come down now”

This harkens back to Jesus’ quote from Daniel, and his coming on the clouds, at his questioning before the Sanhedrin.

It is a demand for Jesus to demonstrate, now, that he is really all he claims to be.

“that we may see and believe”

In effect, they are again demanding a sign, just as the Pharisees had way back in Mark 8:11.

Mark 8:11 – “The Pharisees came and began to question Jesus. To test him, they asked him for a sign from heaven.”

“crucified with him also heaped insults”

Jesus is utterly alone on the cross.

Even his “fellow criminals” revile him.

It is only in Luke’s Gospel that one of the criminals repents, after hearing Jesus’ forgiveness of his crucifiers.

This event is not in Matthew, Mark, or John.

# Mark 15:21-32

(NIV)

## SUMMARY

The crucifixion of Jesus is only described by Mark in one brief sentence:

“And they crucified him” (Mark 15:24 a)

Numerous details point toward the crucifixion as the fulfillment of the Old Testament:

Wine mixed with myrrh (Proverbs 31:6)

Dividing up his clothes and casting lots for them (Psalm 22:18)

Punished with other transgressors (Isaiah 53:12)

Hurling of insults and shaking of heads (Psalm 22:7)

The lack of gruesome detail about the crucifixion, in any Gospel, strongly points to the fact that the Gospel writers are not interested in arousing pity for Jesus.

The focus, instead, is on responding to who Jesus IS and what he has DONE for us.

The optics of the entire situation convince the authorities that their mission is accomplished.

But alone on the cross, Jesus is accomplishing atonement for sin.





## Bibliography

The following materials have been used as sources for this Bible study:

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