

Timeless Transformations

Should the Literal Interpretation of the Crucifixion of Jesus be Taken Literally?

The literal interpretation of the crucifixion of Jesus cannot be taken literally. The first narrative we have of the details of the crucifixion was not written until some 40-45 years after the event of the first Good Friday. That means that two generations passed before this story was written. In that first narrative (the gospel of Mark), the Hebrew Scriptures have already been wrapped literature around the memory of Jesus of Nazareth.

The only words that Mark attributes to him on the cross are a direct quotation from Psalm 22:1

Mark 15:34	Psalm 22:1
And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?	My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?

The story of the people taunting him is also lifted from Psalm 22:7

Mark 15:29-32	Psalm 22:7
15:29 And they that passed by railed on him, wagging their heads, and saying, Ah, thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, 15:30 Save thyself, and come down from the cross. 15:31 Likewise also the chief priests mocking said among themselves with the scribes, He saved others; himself he cannot save. 15:32 Let Christ the King of Israel descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe. And they that were crucified with him reviled him	All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying,

The story of his garments being divided among his tormentors is in Psalm 22:18.

Mark 15:24	Psalm 22:18
And when they had crucified him, they parted his garments, casting lots upon them, what every man should take.	They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture.

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The thieves crucified on each side of him are designed to fulfill Isaiah 53:12 where we are told he was “numbered with the transgressors.”

Mark 15:27-28	Isaiah 53:12
15:27 And with him they crucify two thieves; the one on his right hand, and the other on his left. 15:28 And the scripture was fulfilled, which saith, And he was numbered with the transgressors.	Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

The story of his burial by Joseph of Arimathea, a ruler of the Jews, is designed to give substance to the words - he was associated in death with a rich man, again from Isaiah 53:9.

Mark 15:45-46	Isaiah 53:9
15:45 And when he knew it of the centurion, he gave the body to Joseph. 15:46 And he bought fine linen, and took him down, and wrapped him in the linen, and laid him in a sepulchre which was hewn out of a rock, and rolled a stone unto the door of the sepulchre.	And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth

We also need to remember that the first account of the crucifixion was written in the Greek language that neither Jesus or any of his disciples spoke, so there is no way this could be a first hand, eyewitness account of what actually happened.