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## What Happens When Jesus Dies

In each of our four New Testament Gospels, the events that are narrated immediately after Jesus's death may indicate a primary concern for that particular book.

**The Gospel of Mark:** Immediately after Jesus dies, Mark tells us that the curtain in the Jerusalem temple tore from top to bottom (15:38) and that the centurion recognized that Jesus was the Son of God (15:39).

One interpretation: Mark believes that Jesus's death has provided a ransom for sin (10:45), making the sacrificial cult of the Jerusalem temple obsolete. Mark also wants to tell his readers that it is only through the cross that one can come to understand fully who Jesus is.

**The Gospel of Matthew:** Immediately after Jesus dies, Matthew tells us that the curtain in the Jerusalem temple tore in two and that an earthquake opened tombs in the cemetery such that the bodies of many saints came back to life and came out of their tombs. Then the centurion proclaimed that Jesus was the Son of God (27:51–54).

One interpretation: Matthew, like Mark, believes that Jesus's death has provided a once-for-all-time sacrifice for sin, but Matthew also wants to stress that Jesus's death opens the door to life after death.

It is in the context of this eternal dimension that he is to be regarded as the Son of God.

**The Gospel of Luke:** Immediately after Jesus dies, Luke tells us that the gentile centurion began to praise God, acknowledging Jesus's innocence, and that the multitudes who were present returned home, beating their breasts in repentance (23:47–48).

One interpretation: Luke is less concerned than Mark and Matthew with reflection on the theological meaning of Jesus's death (i.e., its redemptive or atoning effect); however, he is more concerned than the other Gospel writers with the proper response of people to what Jesus has done. Luke believes that the word of the cross should lead people to worship and repentance.

**The Gospel of John:** Immediately after Jesus dies, John tells us that his side was pierced with a spear, causing water and blood to gush forth (19:31–34).

One interpretation: John's Gospel is heavily symbolic, and water and blood are almost universal symbols for life. The flow of water and blood from a person's body is reminiscent of what happens when a woman gives birth. John may be implying that, even as Jesus dies, he gives birth to a new life for all those who believe in him.