

The believing thief

Mark 15:27 NET - And they crucified two outlaws with him, one on his right and one on his left.

[Luke 23:39-43](#) - One of the criminals who was hanging there railed at him, saying, "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!" But the other rebuked him, saying, "Don't you fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we rightly so, for we are getting what we deserve for what we did, but this man has done nothing wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come in your kingdom." And Jesus said to him, "**I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.**"

We know that beside Jesus at the cross were two thieves also being crucified. What's strange is that the judgement doesn't fit the crime of theft. Let's dive into the culture and see how even at the brink of death, Jesus was able to forgive and also give salvation to a dying man.

Under levitic law, judgment for theft required full repayment of the stolen item plus an added penalty.

Leviticus 6:2–5: If a person sins by stealing, extorting, or lying about a lost item they found, and later confesses their guilt, they must restore the full value of the property and **add a fifth of its value (20%)** to it on the day they bring a guilt offering.

Under Roman law (Furtum), judgment for theft was similar but different depending on when the thief is caught:

- Manifest Theft (furtum manifestum): Caught in the act; penalized by paying four times the item's value (quadruplum).
- Non-Manifest Theft (furtum nec manifestum): Discovered after the fact; penalized by paying double the value (duplum).
- Violent Robbery (rapina): Taking property by force carried harsher criminal penalties, often exile, forced labor, or death for lower-class offenders (humiliores).

So we can then assume that the thieves either performed their crime along with hurting or killing their victim, thus once they were caught, they received the death penalty. However, we still don't know the whole context.

In the original Greek texts of Matthew and Mark, the men are called *lēstai* (plural of *lēstēs*). A *lēstēs* is a violent bandit, highway robber, or **rebel guerrilla fighter**. They operated in armed roving bands, destabilizing Roman infrastructure, robbing travelers, and killing imperial officials.

The *lēstai* were executed for sedition, treason, and **armed rebellion\insurrection** against the Roman Empire. So, we can assume they weren't just thieves but insurrectionists against Rome. It is alleged they were part of the same group as Barabbas, and that is strengthened with Mark 15:27, where they are called two outlaws or revolutionaries.

What was his name?

We have one source (argued to be biblical or not) called the gospel of Nicodemus (or Acts of Pilate) which gives us names for multiple figures during the Passion (including Longinus, the soldier who pierced Jesus' side). From that, we find out his name was **Dismas\Dimas\Demas**. The unbelieving thief was named Gestas.

Almost in irony, the meaning behind Dismas meant “sunset” or “death”.

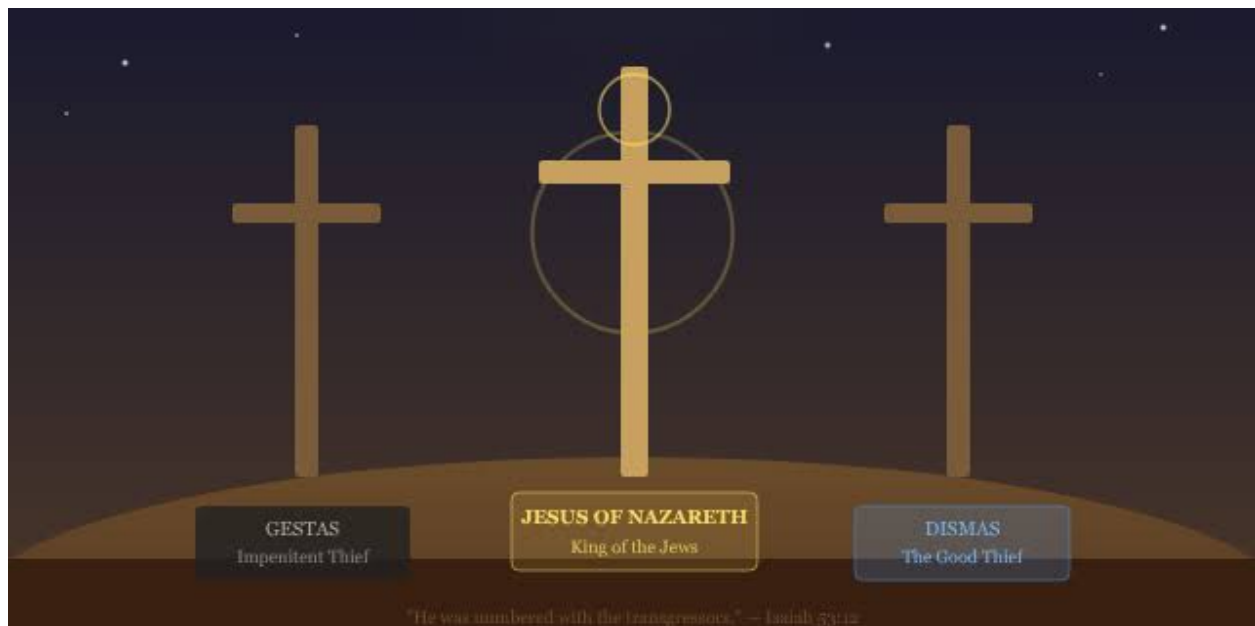
Looking back at the Luke passage, Dismas did the following:

- He **rebukes** his companion for mocking an innocent man
- He **acknowledges** his own guilt and the justice of his punishment
- He **proclaims** Jesus innocent
- He **addresses** Jesus directly as a king with a coming kingdom
- He **receives** the most direct promise of salvation in the entire New Testament: “Today you will be with me in paradise.”

We see here that the thief must’ve either heard about Jesus from word of mouth or possibly witnessed one of Jesus’ sermons, gaining belief in Him enough to **reject the lies of the Pharisees and confess Jesus is King before death**.

This shows us that even at what we think is our lowest point, we can still turn back towards God if we come to Him in humbleness, confess our sin and ask Him to remember us.

Golgotha (“Place of the Skull”) — Jerusalem, c. AD 30–33 | Dismas (right) · Jesus (center) · Gestas (left) - Amazing Bible Timeline with World History



Golgotha (“Place of the Skull”) — Jerusalem, c. AD 30–33 | Dismas (right) · Jesus (center) · Gestas (left) - Amazing Bible Timeline with World History

References:

- Legal and Social Perspectives on Robbers in First-Century Judea -
<https://byustudies.byu.edu/article/legal-and-social-perspectives-on-robbers-in-first-century-judea>
- What Are The Names of the Thieves Crucified With Christ? -
<https://amazingbibletimeline.com/blog/names-of-two-thieves-christ/?srltid=AfmBOopnoWK6HPhypPb9tRIFLniZwVptAv3EI-o8JeTgRd1izqmphVoC#ttc-gospels>
- Bible Hub, Why crucify 2 robbers with Jesus? -
https://biblehub.com/q/Why_crucify_2_robbers_with_Jesus.htm