

## **THE PERSON OF THE PASSION**

### **“Jesus the Christ”**

#### A BIBLICAL EXPOSITION

BY:

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### **INTRODUCTION:**

In the months and weeks leading up to Ash Wednesday, February 25, 2004, Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*, drew more media attention than any movie in recent years! His film became the catalyst for more media controversy than any other Hollywood film about Christ in recent history. If this film would have been produced by some well-known person from the traditional Christian world, it would have almost gone unnoticed. But the fact that this docu-drama was produced and directed by one of the most famous actors in Hollywood – immediately set it apart from a long line of other movies about the life of Christ.

The very fact that Gibson sought to be historically accurate in his graphic portrayal of the horrors of scourging and crucifixion, caused him to be attacked and vilified from every perspective. He quickly became a lightning rod for the liberal media moguls, leftist TV anchors, anti-defamation leagues and anti-Christian journalist. By suggesting – no dogmatically asserting, that the Gospel accounts are accurate history and totally trustworthy, Gibson postured himself in a very politically incorrect position. And to go even further by unambiguously proclaiming that he *passionately believes* that Jesus was who He claimed to be – only increased the gravity of his heresy in their perspective! In Tensiltown a feeding frenzy started that will probably continue for as long as this movie is shown.

But for Gibson, this movie was more than just an objective piece of media art. He was very clear about the fact that he was *passionately involved* spiritually and emotionally in the production of this movie. And he certainly “put his money where his mouth and heart were” by investing some 30 million dollars of his own money in the production cost. So he made no claims about being objective, unbiased or dispassionate in the production of his movie about the last hours of Christ's earthly ministry.

By his repeated testimony, Gibson had gone through a great crisis in his own life about a dozen years prior to producing this film. Though he had reached the very pinnacle of success from any and every standard in Hollywood by starring in a series of very successful movies, he still went through existential despair. He had lost all meaning, purpose and satisfaction in life. As a result he was on a fast tract toward a premature death by a very self-destructive life-style. But then he turned back to the Christ that he had known about from his Catholic upbringing. As a result of that time of study and meditation about Christ – especially His *passion*, Gibson's life was radically changed. As he has repeatedly said since then: “*Christ's wounds healed my wounds! So I had to tell this story by producing this movie!*” From that moment on, he was *passionate* about ‘*The Passion of the Christ!*’

I was privileged to go to an early previewing of the movie for clergy and religious leaders in my area. I found it to be a very graphic and riveting account of the last 12 hours of Christ leading

up to His crucifixion. Without a doubt, it is the most accurate and most powerful presentations of the passion of Christ that has ever been produced to date in Hollywood. This movie rings true for anyone who has been a serious student of the Bible, of the Holy Land, of Roman history, of the Jewish Culture, of the horrific means of capital punishment known as crucifixion! It rightly has an “R” rating – but the “R” is for *reality!*

Even though *The Passion of the Christ* was a dramatization drawn from the Four Gospels, there was not a lot of direct Scriptural quotation in the movie. The verbal message was relatively brief because the visual message was so powerful and poignant. When speaking did take place, there was a simple eloquence about it. And the entire script was in the original languages spoken in that day – Hebrew and Aramaic by the Jews, and Latin by the Romans. So the brief translations through subtitles were the only source for the quotation or paraphrase of Scripture.

As already noted, Gibson’s movie had a relatively narrow focus – the last 12 hours of Christ leading up to His crucifixion. The events of this time period have historically been known as the *passion* of Christ – thus the appropriate title of the movie. But this relatively narrow focus can be both a strength and weakness – depending upon the Biblical knowledge a person took into the movie. If they viewed the movie through the context of a broad perspective of the Bible, they will come away with a greater understanding of the *passion* of Christ. But if they had little or no knowledge about the Bible in general – and the life of Christ in particular, they would come away with an incomplete understanding of Christ. They will understand something of the *passion of His death* but not the *passion of His life* – either before and after His crucifixion. That’s why other movies like the *Jesus Film* are a great compliment to *The Passion of the Christ* because they present a more comprehensive portrayal of Christ from the Gospels. They take you from His birth to His death almost verse-by-verse. But in between those two great events, they also cover His teachings...His miracles...His passion...His resurrection...His Commission...His ascension...His coming through the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost.

It is my desire then, to do the very same thing through this in-depth study of *The Passion of the Christ*. I want to help you view and evaluate it within the wider context of the Bible – both Old and New Testaments. And whereas Mel Gibson based his movie almost exclusively on the Four Gospels, I will greatly amplify that perspective through the rest of the New Testament writings – especially the Book of Acts, the Epistles and Hebrews.

Therefore, I want to share with you many of the verses that were being replayed in my mind as I first watched this movie shortly before its official release. I hope these Scripture passages and commentary will help you view and reflect upon ‘*The Passion of the Christ*’ through more holistic Biblical lenses. It is my prayer that these verses and passages will help you have a greater *passion* for the *Incarnate Word*, Jesus Christ, who is revealed in the *Inscriptured Word*, the Bible.

Mel Gibson’s movie filled the mind and heart of the audience with many *visual* scenes of Christ’s passion. I want to *saturate* your mind and heart with the myriads of Biblical passages that a viewer needs to clearly associate this movie with. After prayerfully reading these many passages I will share, I pray that you will never be able to see a cross representing the death of

Christ in the same way. From this time on, I hope that every silver, gold or brass cross you see on an altar or communion table – will be blood stained in your spiritual eyes! May the graphic visual scenes of Gibson's movie, coupled with these many Scriptures (\*), cause you to live your life with a new *passion* for the Lord Jesus – because of His great *passion* for you as demonstrated by the cross!

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(\*) Throughout this study I will be using the *New International Version (NIV)* of the Bible unless otherwise stated. Also, I will be capitalizing all pronouns referring to God or Christ. This is done for two reasons. First of all, to show *respect* for the members of the Godhead. And secondly, to help distinguish them from other human beings.

## THE PRELUDE OF THE CROSS

The crucifixion of Christ was not just some isolated event that took place in a historical vacuum. It was *the* saving event of history that God had prepared from the eons of past eternity. That's why John the Beloved disciple called Jesus "...**the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world**" (Rev. 13:8; c.f. Matt. 25:34). Therefore, when properly understood, every animal sacrifice in the Old Testament pointed toward the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. This is especially significant because of the defining role that *the shedding of blood* played in every animal sacrifice. All of these annual sacrifices from the *Old Covenant* were foreshadows of the perfect and final sacrifice of Christ that was the basis for the *New Covenant*.

Space does not permit me to do a thorough study of all of the Old Testament sacrifices. But they are the *historic* and *spiritual foundation* that the entire New Testament is built upon. And every builder knows that the most important part of any building is the *foundation!* If it is not strong and secure, the superstructure will be unstable and shaky – just like many Christian's superficial Biblical knowledge and 'fearful faith!' Therefore, I will take a disproportionate amount of space in this first chapter because I want you to have a "firm foundation" to build your passion upon! So without a basic understanding of these Old Testament sacrifices, one's view of *The Passion of the Christ* will be severely myopic and truncated. These many animal sacrifices were the historic and spiritual prelude of Christ's final sacrifice on the cross. And they were the very *heart* of the Jewish religion and culture. Therefore, there are several truths that run through every sacrifice. There is a *scarlet cord* binding all of these sacrifices to the *passion* of Christ on the cross.

Here is a simple summary of these animal sacrifices precluding the crucifixion of Christ. Each sacrifice was to be *perfect* and *precious* – so they were *costly*. Each one was *precisely prepared* in every detail according to God's instructions. In each animal sacrifice, there was a *loss of life*. So central to every sacrifice was an *altar* upon which an innocent animal was slain. Most importantly, *the shedding of blood* was the very heart of every sacrifice.

These simple – but profound truths, are clearly defined by the very Hebrew word that is used for *sacrifice*. It is the word *zabach*, and means: "*To slaughter an animal.*" The King James Version often interchanges the word "*offering*" instead of sacrifice. Here the Hebrew word is *minchah* and means: "*to apportion, to bestow a gift, to make a sacrificial offering.* In either case, the meaning is very clear – *the death of an animal!* Therefore, every animal sacrifice pointed toward the sacrifice of Christ. These many sacrifices were the spiritual object lessons carefully prescribed by God to point and prepare the Jewish people for the coming sacrifice of the Messiah. So if you do not understand this Old Testament background, you will never fully appreciate '*The Passion of the Christ.*' Let me share just a few foundational examples:

## God's First Sacrifice

After Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, they felt naked and ashamed before each other and before God. So they did what many people do – they “got religion!” We read that “...**they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves**” (Gen. 3:7). In doing so, *they performed the very first religious act in history*. They “...**sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.**” This was man’s first attempt to deal with his own sin through the *work* of his hands. So the central tenant in every religion is some form of *works righteousness*. It is an attempt to in some way “cover up” your own sin by the *work* of your own hands. The Biblical word for “covering” is the word *atonement* – which is used some 150 times in the Old Testament. It means “to cover or conceal” and is always associated with two things: the *forgiveness of sins* and *reconciliation with God*. So *atonement* denotes “a covering that conceals a person’s sin and makes it possible for him to approach God.”

Therefore, when Adam and Eve “got religion” and tried to “...**sew fig leaves together to cover themselves**” – it was the first act of *works righteousness* in human history! But God told them that the gravity of their sin and disobedience was too great to be *cheaply* covered by “**fig leaves.**”

God had previously warned the man and woman that if they disobeyed Him “...**they would surely die.**” Regardless of His love for them, God could not and would not lay aside His holiness and justice. His word and very nature were at stake. So since they deserved to die as a result of their willful disobedience – *someone* or *something* had to die. A *punishment unto death* would have to take place, or God would compromise His holiness in the face of sin. Either they would be put to death – or something else living would be put to death in their place. A *substitute* would have to be found! So we read these words: “**The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them**” (Gen. 3:21).

This brief sentence summarizes the first act of *grace* in human history. It teaches two things: *the severity of sin* and *the sovereignty of mercy*. This little verse reminds us that *God takes sin deathly serious!* The true and living God will not trifle with sin and disobedience in the lives of those whom He created in His “...**image and likeness**” (Gen. 1:26). It must be *atoned* for. And since Adam and Eve could not provide an adequate covering for themselves through their *works* – God provided through His *grace* the *substitution* of an animal that died in their place. So *what God’s justice and holiness required* – *His mercy and grace provided!* This then, was the very first act of *substitutionary atonement* recorded in the Bible. An innocent animal – unquestionably a lamb, was slain as a *substitute* for Adam and Eve! *Blood was shed* and an *atonement* was provided.

So in the face of sin, an innocent life was given in exchange for the guilty couple. How they must have been horrified at the sight of an innocent animal dying in their place! They had not seen death before. They had not seen blood shed as a life was poured

out! They had not seen an animal skinned. But it was an object lesson of grace they would never forget – and it would provide a new basis for their *forgiveness* and *fellowship* with the God – whom they had sinned against. The skin of that slain animal would now “*covered them*” in a way their “fig leaves” never could. They were now “**clothed**” in the innocence of something else that had *died in their place!*

Therefore, this is the *foundational sacrifice* in the Bible. All other sacrifices would be built upon this spiritual altar. And all subsequent sacrifices pointed toward *The Passion of the Christ!*

#### A. *Abel’s Sacrifice:*

In this Biblical account of the *second sacrifice* recorded in the Bible, there is a stark contrast drawn. Two brothers. Same parents. Two very different sacrifices. One accepted by God. One totally rejected.

**“Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor”** (Gen. 4:2-5).

Obviously both Cain and Abel had previously received a basic understanding of the kind of sacrifice that God accepted from the teaching of their parents, Adam and Eve. No doubt they had been taught from their earliest years how “**The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them.**” But the oldest son tried his own version of “religion” and “works righteousness” – just like his parents had done before him (see: I Jn. 3:12; Jude11).

By contrast, the younger son, Abel, came by *faith*, just as his parents had later done after God had rejected the “works of their hands.” So we read that Abel “...**brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock.**” So once again we see clearly implied a *substitutionary atonement* through the sacrifice of “...**the firstborn of his flock.**” At the heart of Abel’s sacrifice was “faith in the blood” as the only means of his *atonement* before God.

Notice also the consistency of what God would later teach through Moses about animal sacrifices:

**“When any of you brings an offering to the Lord...a burnt offering from the herd, he is to offer a male without defect...it will be accepted on his behalf to make atonement for him...From what he offers he is to make this offering to the Lord by fire; all the fat...The priest shall burn them on the altar as food, an offering made by fire, a pleasing aroma. All the fat is the Lord’s”** (Lev. 1:2-4; 3:16).

Later the writer of Hebrews reflects on Abel's sacrifice this way: **“By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks even though he is dead”** (Heb. 11:4). So while Cain came to God on the basis of his *works*, Abel came on the basis of *faith* – **“And without faith it is impossible to please God...”** (Heb. 11:6).

### *Abraham's Sacrifice of Isaac*

Here is one of the most poignant and revealing sacrifices in the Old Testament – a sacrifice that was literally stopped while the “knife was at the throat!” This story is so simple and descriptive that it needs little comment or commentary. As you read this ancient story – the events of *The Passion of the Christ* will come into clearer focus. This is the single greatest Old Testament passage that precludes the sacrifice of Christ thousands of years later. You remember the story...

In fulfillment of His promise, God had miraculously given Abraham and Sarah a firstborn son in their old age. He was conceived and born long after their child-bearing years had passed for them. This son's name was Isaac. His very name tells a lot of the story – because *Isaac* means *“he laughs!”* They named him that because Sarah had **“...laughed to herself”** when she heard the angelic announcement that she would have a child in her old age (Gen. 18:12).

Understandably, Abraham dearly loved this son of his old age. Isaac was the very “apple of his father's eye!” But then we read how **“God tested Abraham.”** This test would reveal the *heart of Abraham*. Even more it would reveal the *heart of God*. And at the same time it would demonstrate Abraham's incredible *faith* in the true and living God. Here was the test:

**“Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love and go to the region of Moriah (Remember this location for our later study). Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about”** (Gen. 22:2).

The severity of this test goes beyond our human comprehension. It goes against all of our senses and sensibilities! At the reading of this passage, everything within us cries out a resounding “NO!” This sacrifice is *too costly!* It's not *fair!* It is *unreasonable!* It does not make *sense!* In our heart of hearts we cry out *“Why God?!”*

But contrary to every human inclination as a father, Abraham did what God commanded him to do. Listen further to the account of Abraham's incredible *faith* and prompt *obedience*.

**“Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about. On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance (Remember this**

*place!*). He said to his servants. ‘Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will *worship* and then we will come back to you.

Abraham took the *wood* for the burnt offering and *placed it on his son Isaac*, and he himself carried the *fire* and the *knife*. As the two of them went on together, Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, ‘Father?’ ‘Yes, my son?’ Abraham replied. ‘The fire and wood are here,’ Isaac said, ‘but where is the *lamb* for the burnt offering?’

Abraham answered, ‘*God Himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.*’ And the two of them went on together.

When they reached the place God had told them about, Abraham built an *altar* there and arranged the wood on it. He *bound his son Isaac* and *laid him on the altar*, on top of the wood. Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to *slay his son*. But the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, ‘Abraham! Abraham!’

‘Here I am,’ he replied.

Do not lay a hand on the boy...Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you *fear God*, because you have not withheld from me your son, *your only son.*’

Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and *sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son*. So Abraham called that place, ‘*The Lord will Provide*’ (“Jehovah-Jireh”). And to this day it is said, ‘*On the mountain of the Lord* (Remember this *place!*) *it will be provided*’ (Gen. 22:1-14).

Is it any wonder Abraham is considered by both Jews and Christians the “father of our faith” (Rom. 4:11-17). No wonder Abraham is called the “...*friend of God*” (II Chron. 20:7; Isa. 41:8; Ja. 2:23)! Listen to how Abraham’s faith and obedience is described by the writer of Hebrews:

“*By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, ‘It is through Isaac that your offspring will be called.’ Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death*” (Heb. 11:17-19; c.f. Rom. 4:1-25).

So Abraham’s faith and obedience in his willingness to sacrifice his firstborn son on the altar is one of the greatest foreshadows of Christ passion in the Old Testament.

## *The Passover Sacrifice for Israel*

This is the foundational feast of Judaism. It is their corporate salvation event as a nation. This annual commemoration and celebration is the immediate context of *The Passion of the Christ*. Unless you understand the historic origin of the Passover, you will not fully understand the spiritual significance of Christ's sacrifice on the cross. So you cannot separate the *Passover* from the *passion*. The two are inseparably connected together historically and spiritually. It was the *Passover Feast* that Jesus celebrated with His disciples the night before He went to the cross.

Since the vast majority of Gentile Christians do not annually celebrate the *Passover* as the Jews do, we need to be reminded of the historical narrative that this Feast is based upon. So let's refresh our memory of this defining event in Israel's history.

The Jews were slaves in Egypt. They were in servile bondage to Pharaoh – and absolutely powerless to do anything about it. And since Egypt is a Biblical typology of the *world*, this is a picture of all of us. We are all *slaves to the world around us* – with no ability to break that bondage. So God did for the Jews what they could not do for themselves – and it was all based upon a *blood sacrifice!* Read carefully and prayerfully God's instructions to His people through Moses:

**“The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in Egypt. ‘This month is to be for you the *first month, the first month of your year*. Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a *lamb* for his family, one for each household...The animals you chose must be *year-old males without defect*...Take care of them until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the people of the community of Israel must *slaughter them at twilight*.**

**Then they are to take some of the *blood* and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lambs. That same night they are to eat the meat roasted over the fire, along with bitter herbs, and *bread without yeast*...This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. Eat it in haste, *it is the Lord's Passover*.**

**On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every *firstborn* – both men and animals – and *I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt*. I am the Lord. The *blood* will be a *sign* for you on the houses where you are; and *when I see the blood, I will pass over you*. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt.**

**This is a *day you are to commemorate*; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a *festival to the Lord* – a lasting ordinance. For seven days you are to *eat bread made without yeast*...Celebrate the *Feast of Unleavened Bread* (Remember this significant “bread without yeast!”), because it was on this very day that I brought your divisions out of Egypt...For seven days *no yeast* is to be**

found in your houses...*Eat nothing made with yeast. Wherever you live, you must eat unleavened bread.*'

Then Moses summoned all the elders of Israel and said to them, 'Go at once and select the animals for your families and *slaughter the Passover lamb*. Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it into the *blood* in the basin and put some of the *blood* on the top and on both sides of the doorframe. Not one of you shall go out the door of his house until morning. When the Lord goes through the land to strike down the Egyptians, *He will see the blood* on the top and sides of the doorframe and will *pass over* that doorway, and He will not permit the destroyer to enter your houses and strike you down.

Obey these instructions as a *lasting ordinance* for you and your descendants. When you enter the land that the Lord will give you as He promised, *observe this ceremony*. And when your children ask you, 'What does this ceremony mean to you?' then tell them, '*It is the Passover sacrifice to the Lord, who passed over* the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when He struck down the Egyptians. Then the people bowed down and *worshiped*'" (Ex. 12:1-27).

So you cannot separate the *Passover* of the Jews from *The Passion of the Christ!* Nor can you separate the *Feast of Passover* from its spiritual companion, the *Feast of Unleavened Bread*. Both of these Feasts were fulfilled by Christ's *sinless life* and *sacrificial death* – in minute detail!

With those Scriptures resonating in your heart and mind, now read the following passages about *The Passion of Christ*.

#### *Jesus Sacrifice for Us*

Among the *many* Scriptures I could share here about Christ's *passion*, the following are only representative – not exhaustive.

- "...Jews and Gentiles alike are all under *sin*. As it is written: '*There is no one righteous, not even one...All have turned away...there is no one who does good, not even one*'...Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that *every mouth may be silenced* and the *whole world held accountable to God*. Therefore *no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law*...But now a *righteousness from God*, apart from the law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. *This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe*. There is no difference, for *all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*, and are *justified freely by His grace* through the *redemption that came by Christ Jesus*. God presented Him as a *sacrifice of atonement, through faith in His blood*. He did this to demonstrate His *justice*, because in His forbearance He had left the sins

**committed beforehand unpunished – He did it to demonstrate His *justice* at the present time, so as to be *just* and the *one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus*” (Rom. 3:9 – 26).**

These next verses are written by the Apostle Paul, a converted Jew, to a young church that was tolerating sexual immorality and perversion by one of its members. So as their spiritual father he writes to exhort them to exercise *church discipline* rather than to continue to boast about their *liberality* and *tolerance* (sounds like much of the American church today!). And read these verses with the *Feast of Passover* in your mind. Then read the following exhortation from Paul to one of his more mature churches in Ephesus.

- **“Your boasting is not good. Don’t you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? Get rid of the *old yeast* that you may be a *new batch without yeast* – as you really are. *For Christ our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed*. Therefore let us *keep the Festival*, not with the *old yeast*, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with *bread without yeast*, the bread of sincerity and truth” (I Cor. 5:6-8).**
- **“Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and *live a life of love*, just as *Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God*” (Eph. 5:1-2)**

There is no book in the New Testament that links the sacrifices of the Old Testament with *The Passion of the Christ*, like Hebrews. The superiority and supremacy of Christ is the theme woven through the entire book – with a *scarlet thread!* Here are just a few of the verses about the full and final sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

- **“Jesus has become the guarantee of a *better covenant*...because Jesus lives forever, He has a *permanent priesthood*. Therefore, He is able to *save completely those who come to God through Him*, because He always lives to intercede for them...such a high priest meets our need – one who is *holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners*, exalted above the heavens. Unlike the other high priests, He does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for His own sins, and then for the sins of the people. *He sacrificed for their sins once for all when He offered Himself*” (Heb. 7:22-27).**
- **“When everything had been arranged...the priests entered regularly into the outer room to carry on their ministry. But only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and *never without blood*, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance...When Christ came as high priest...He went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made...He did not enter by means of the *blood* of goats and calves, but He entered the Most Holy Place *once for all by His own blood*, having obtained *eternal***

**redemption.** The *blood* of goats and bulls...sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the *blood of Christ*, who through the eternal Spirit *offered Himself unblemished to God*, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to *death*, so that we may serve the living God!

For this reason *Christ is the mediator of a new covenant*, that those who are called may receive the promised *eternal inheritance* – now that He has *died as a ransom* to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant...

When Moses had proclaimed every commandment of the law to all the people, he took the *blood* of calves...and sprinkled the scroll and all the people. He said, '*This is the blood of the covenant*, which God has commanded you to keep'...The law requires that nearly everything be *cleansed with blood*, and *without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness*...For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; He entered heaven itself, now to *appear for us in God's presence*. Nor did He enter heaven to *offer Himself* again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with *blood* that is not his own. Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now He has appeared *once for all* at the end of the ages *to do away with sin by the sacrifice of Himself*. Just as man is destined to *die once*, and *after that the judgment*, so *Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people*; and He will appear a *second time*, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for Him" (Heb. 9:11 – 28).

- "...we have been *made holy* through the *sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all*. Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which *can never take away sins* (they could "atone" or "cover" – but never "take away sins"). But when this priest had *offered for all time one sacrifice for sins*, He *sat down* at the right hand of God. Since that time He waits for His enemies to be made His footstool, because *by one sacrifice He has made perfect forever those who are being made holy*" (Heb. 10:10 – 14).

Now let me close this foundational study on the Old Testament sacrifices with a couple of summary verses. They were written by John the Beloved Disciple – who stood at the foot of the cross and observed *The Passion of the Christ*. Many years after these events, John writes and reflects upon the Person and work of Christ.

- "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched – this we proclaim concerning the *Word of life*. The life

appeared; and we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the *eternal life*, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have *fellowship* with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ...God is light, in Him there is no darkness at all...if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the *blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin*...If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness...My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. *He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins*, and not only for our sins but also for the sins of the whole world” (I Jn. 1:1- 2:2).

- “Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been *born of God* and *knows God*. Whoever does not love does not know God, because *God is love*. This is how God showed His love among us; He sent His one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him. This is love; not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an *atoning sacrifice for our sins*” (I Jn. 4:7-10).

So if *sacrifices* are the very heart of the Old Testament because they represent the heart of God, what must we conclude? What is to be our response to *The Passion of the Christ*?” The Apostle Paul gives us the perfect summary.

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of *God’s mercy*, to *offer your bodies as living sacrifices*, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of *worship*. Do not *conform* any longer to the pattern of this world (Egypt), but be *transformed* by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – His good, pleasing and perfect will” (Rom. 12:1-2).

So it is *The Passion of the Christ* for us that is to inspire a *passion for Christ* in return! That is what the Apostle Paul calls *authentic worship*. Nothing more. Nothing less.

## THE PROPHECIES OF THE CROSS

Fulfilled prophecies is one of the greatest proof for the divine inspiration of the Bible. It is also one of the greatest proofs that Jesus was just who He claimed to be – God’s *Messiah*, the *Savior* of the world.

In my book, *How To Study The Bible* (\*), I introduce the importance of fulfilled prophecy this way:

“Simply put, no other religion in the world has such a wealth of fulfilled prophecy as does Christianity. *No other world religious leader’s coming was foretold hundreds of years in advance in such minute detail as was Christ’s!* The Old Testament was written over an approximate 1,500 years and contains several hundred prophecies and references to the coming of Christ the Messiah. These prophecies can be conveniently divided into two types: Prophecies of a *Kingly Messiah* and prophecies of a *Suffering Messiah*. Jesus Christ fulfilled both! The accurate fulfillment of those hundreds of prophecies is explicable only in terms of the fact that Jesus was indeed the Messiah of God – and the Bible is indeed His revelation of those prophecies and their fulfillment!” (p. 62).

After that introduction, I give 3 pages of charts listing very specific prophetic references, and their detailed fulfillment by Christ. Around 30 of those prophecies specifically related to the circumstances surrounding His crucifixion. Was this just coincidence? Did Jesus cunningly manipulate circumstances so as to try and prove He was the Messiah? Was He just a religious con artist and false prophet – like many others in His day (Mtt. 7:15; 24:24; Acts 5:33-37; I Jn. 4:1)? That might sound like a plausible argument initially – but it will not stand up under close examination. Why? Simply because of this fact: *Many of the prophecies that were fulfilled by Christ were completely outside of his control.* They were outside the realm of human manipulation – especially events related to His *birth* and *death*. Here are just a few of the very specific events that Jesus could not have in any way manipulated:

- The *place* of His birth (Mic. 5:2)
- The *time* of His birth (Dan. 9:25)
- The *manner* of His birth (Isa. 7:14)
- The *details* of His betrayal (Ps. 41:9)
- The *way* He would be put to death (Ps. 22:1)
- The *circumstances* of His burial (Isa. 53:9)

With those basic facts in mind, let me specifically outline for you the major *prophecies about His passion*. Space will only permit me to cite the prophecy with its Old Testament *reference* and New Testament *fulfillment*. And I will only cite one reference for each, when most of these prophecies have multiple references. I hope you will take the time to look up each one of these references for further study.

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(\*) You can order a copy of *How To Study The Bible* by writing or emailing NDI.

<i>PROPHECY</i>	<i>O.T. REFERENCE</i>	<i>N.T. FULFILLMENT</i>
• He would triumphantly enter Jerusalem	Zech. 9:9	Lk. 19:28-44
• He would be a “stumbling stone” to Jews	Ps. 118:22	Rom. 9:32-33
• He would be rejected by His own people	Ps. 69:8	Mtt. 21:42-43
• He would be hated without cause	Isa 49:7	Jn. 15:25
• He would be betrayed by a close friend	Ps. 41:9	Jn. 13:21
• He would be sold for 30 pieces of silver	Zech. 11:12	Mtt. 26:15
• The money would be thrown into the temple	Zech. 11:13	Mtt. 27:5
• Money used to buy the Potter’s Field	Zech. 11:13	Mtt. 27:7
• He would be forsaken by His disciples	Zech. 13:7	Mtt. 26:31-32
• He would be accused by false witnesses	Ps. 35:11	Mtt. 26:59-61
• He would be silent before His accusers	Isa. 53:7	Mtt. 27:12-19
• He would be wounded and bruised	Isa. 53:5	Mtt. 27:26
• He would be smitten and spit upon	Isa 50:6	Mtt. 26:67
• He would be mocked	Ps. 22:7-8	Mtt. 27:31
• He would fall beneath the cross	Ps. 109:24-25	Lk. 23:26
• His hands and feet would be pierced	Ps. 22:16	Lk. 23:33
• He would be crucified between thieves	Isa. 53:12	Mk. 15:27-28
• He would pray for His persecutors	Isa. 53:12	Lk. 23:34
• His friends would stand afar off	Ps. 38:11	Lk. 23:49
• He would be stared at on the cross	Ps. 22:17	Lk. 23:35
• His garments would be gambled for	Ps. 22:18	Jn. 19:23-24
• He would suffer thirst on the cross	Ps. 22:15	Jn. 19:28
• Gall and vinegar would be offered Him	Ps. 69:21	Mtt. 27:34
• He would cry out a forsaken cry	Ps. 22:1	Mtt. 27:46
• He would commit Himself to God	Ps. 31:5	Lk. 23:46
• None of His bones would be broken	Ps. 34:20	Jn. 19:34
• His side would be pierced	Zech. 12:10	Jn. 19:34
• Darkness would cover the land	Amos 8:9	Mtt. 27:49
• He would be buried in a rich man’s tomb	Isa. 53:9	Mtt. 27:57-60
• He would be resurrected from the dead	Ps. 16:10	Mtt. 28:6

Just a cursory examination of these many prophecies is overwhelming to our human perspective! The specificity of these many prophecies and fulfillments is mind-boggling! There can be no other logical conclusions from any objective study of them other than the fact that Jesus was *Who* He claimed to be – and the Bible is *what* it claims to be!

After Jesus’ resurrection, ascension and sending of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, the Apostle Peter boldly confronted the same Jews who had previously helped condemn

Christ to death. In his sermon to them, he clearly relates the events of *The Passion of the Christ* – and their role in them, to the fulfillment of ancient prophecies.

**“Now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. But *this is how God fulfilled what He had foretold through all the prophets, saying that His Christ would suffer...Indeed, all the prophets from Samuel on, as many as have spoken, have foretold these days. And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers*” (Acts 3:17-25).**

Peter clearly asserted that “...**all the prophets...have foretold these days.**” And he reminds them that since they were Jews just like him, they too were “...**heirs of the prophets.**” These prophecies and fulfillments were their spiritual inheritance as well – but only if they believed in Christ as their Messiah. And we today are also “...**heirs of the prophets**” if we place our faith in *The Passion of the Christ* as revealed in God’s Word!

But before moving to the next point, I want to look at several very specific and significant prophecies about the death of Christ.

### *Prophecy One*

The very *first* Old Testament prophecy about *The Passion of the Christ* is found in the very *first* book in the Bible – Genesis, the *Book of Beginnings*. This prophecy was given by no less authority than God Himself! And it was given as a part His *judgment* against that ancient serpent the devil, who had enticed Adam and Eve to sin.

**“The Lord God said to the serpent: ‘Because you have done this, ‘*Cursed are you above all the livestock and all the wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring* (demons and wicked people; Jn.8:44) *and hers* (the human race and Jesus); *he will crush your head and you will strike his heel*” (Gen. 3:14-15).**

Through this primal sin, the serpent injected his lethal spiritual poison into the blood stream of Adam and Eve – which spread to all of their ancestry, including you and me. As Paul would later summarize: “...**sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned.**” As a result “...**death reigned from the time of Adam...**” (Rom. 5:12). However, the prophets foretold of One who would be born into the human race who would be without sin because He would be *conceived by God in the womb of a virgin*. As a result, He would be the only One who could defeat that ancient serpent!

In this most ancient of all Messianic prophecies, there are two crucial nouns: “**head**” and “**heel.**” But in the Hebrew language, the *verbs* tend to be more important than the *nouns*. It is a language of *action*. And the two key verbs here are: “**crush**” and “**strike.**” Specifically we are told that one of the “**offspring of the woman**” would “**crush the head**” of the serpent – but in the process that serpent would “**strike his heel.**” Jews and

Christians through the centuries have interpreted this verse both in a *general* and *specific* way.

First, there is the wider truth with general application that every member of Adam's race has been bitten and infected with the spiritually lethal poison of that ancient serpent, the devil. That's why we previously saw that "...**death reigned from the time of Adam**" in the lives of *all* of the "...**offspring of the woman.**"

But there is a more specific and exclusive fulfillment of this verse in the coming of the Messiah. "**In the fullness of time**" (Gal. 4:4), a totally unique Person would be born as the "**offspring**" or "**seed of the woman.**" The prophet Daniel would call Him "...**a son of Man**" who was uniquely sent and anointed by "**the Ancient of Days**" (Dan. 7:13). Interestingly, this title "**Son of man**" was the description that Jesus used most about Himself. This is especially highlighted in Matthew – the Gospel written *by a Jew and for the Jews*. Therefore, all of his Jewish readers would have clearly understood the Messianic significance of that title Jesus used of Himself (Matt. 8:20; 12:3, 32, 40; 16:13, 27-28; 17:9; 19:28; Rev. 1:13; 14:14). Much later the Apostle Paul would rightly call Him the "**last Adam**" who would perfectly fulfill what the "**first Adam**" failed at (I Cor. 15:45) – living a life of *perfect obedience* to God.

So clearly, Genesis 3:15 is the very first Messianic prophecy in the Bible. It is the first prediction of *The Passion of the Christ!*

Before we leave this seminal little verse, it is instructive to note that crucifixion is the only known means of execution whereby the *heel* is usually pierced! So through the crucifixion, Satan would "...**strike his heel**" – but Jesus would "...**crush his head!**"

Coincidence? Hardly! Viewed through the cross, there can be no doubt that this refers to *The Passion of the Christ!*

### *Prophecy Two*

Another very revealing prophecy about the crucifixion of Christ comes out of the Exodus Story of the Jewish people. It is the story of the *Bronze Snake*. Remember the story? The people had once again become discontent with how God was running things. They murmured and complained against God and Moses. They didn't like their daily diet of "bread, water and manna" that God was providing. As a result of their discontent and disobedience, God sent a judgment upon them – in the forms of deadly *serpents!* (Better not complain about your next meal!). Note this account...

**"Then the Lord sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died. The people came to Moses and said, 'We sinned when we spoke against the Lord and against you. Pray that the Lord will take the snakes away from us.' So Moses prayed for the people.**

**The Lord said to Moses, ‘Make a snake and put it up on a pole, anyone who is bitten can *look* at it and *live*.’ So Moses made a *bronze snake* and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and *looked* (faith!) at the *bronze snake*, he *lived*” (Num. 21:4-9).**

You might be thinking: “That’s an interesting story Williams, but what does it have to do with *The Passion of the Christ*? Everything! Do you remember Jesus’ late evening conversation with Nicodemus? As you will recall, he was a member of the Sanhedrin, or the highest Ruling Council of the Jews. It was to this very respected religious leader that Jesus said those now famous words: “**You must be *born again*”** (Jn. 3:3) – words that have echoed down through the centuries bringing radical spiritual transformation to hundreds of millions of people from every class, creed and culture!

But this was a spiritual concept Nicodemus was struggling to understand. It required a radical spiritual paradigm shift in his thinking. To Nicodemus, this concept was as revolutionary as “**...being born a second time**” (Jn. 3:4). All of his life he had been putting his confidence in “works righteousness” that he believed came by obedience to the Law. Now he would have to shift his focus from *faith in his good works* to *faith in the perfect work of Christ!* It would only be by putting his *faith* in Jesus as God’s Messiah that he would be “**...born of the Spirit**” (Jn. 3:8). Only this faith in Jesus would allow him to see and experience “**...the Kingdom of God**” (Jn. 3:3).

In the face of Nicodemus’ struggle to understand, Jesus reminded him of a very familiar story. As a good Jewish Rabbi, Jesus reached way back to the Exodus story to illustrate this matter of *faith*. He very specifically relates Himself to a story Nicodemus well understood – the story of the *bronze serpent*. “**Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert,**” Jesus said to Nicodemus, “**so the Son of Man must be *lifted up*, that everyone who believes in Him may have eternal life**” (Jn. 3:14-15). What is the very next verse that follows this? Perhaps the most familiar verse in the entire Bible – John 3:16:

**“For God so *loved* the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever *believes* in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.”**

And the following verse is just as crucial: “**For God did not send His Son into the world to *condemn the world*, but to *save the world* through Him**” (Jn. 3:17).

Jesus later made this very same prediction about the nature of His death to His disciples that he earlier had said to Nicodemus: “**But I, when *I am lifted up from the earth*, will draw all men to Myself**” (Jn. 12:32).

So *how* would Jesus be “***lifted up***” so that He could “**...save the world?**” By being crucified on a *cross*! It was only when He would be “***lifted up***” on the cross – suspended between heaven and earth, that He would be like the bronze serpent that Moses “**...put on a pole**” an “***lifted up***” in the wilderness. Then all who had been bitten by the poisonous snakes could “**...look...and live.**”

Using similar words, Jesus later taught the same principle: **“For My Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in Him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day”** (Jn. 6:39-40).

That’s what *The Passion of the Christ* is all about! The **“lifting up”** of the Jesus on the cross so that *anyone* who **“...looks to the Son and believes in Him shall have eternal life.”**

### *Prophecy Three*

Finally, a very significant – but often overlooked verse about the cross, is Galatians 3:13 - 14:

**“Christ redeemed us** (literally means: ‘to buy out of slavery’) **from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree’** (Note the OT background of this in Deut. 21:22-23). **He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus...”**

There are two crucial questions here that we need to ask – and then seek Biblical answers for. First, **“Why do we need to be redeemed?”** Answer? Because we have all broken God’s law, and as a result are under the *curse* of death. As Jesus said: **“Everyone who sins is a slave to sin”** (Jn. 8:34). So because **“...all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God,”** and because **“...the wages of sin is death”** (Rom. 3:23; 6:23) – we are all under the **“curse of the law.”** That’s the bad news!

But the good news is that God provided a *substitutionary redemption* through Jesus Christ. Remember the story of Abraham and Isaac on Mt. Moriah that we looked at earlier? God did the same thing there – on the same mountain Jesus was crucified on. There on Mt. Moriah God provided Abraham a *substitutionary atonement* for his son, Isaac, through the **“...ram caught by its horns”** in the bushes nearby. As a result of this perfectly timed miracle of provision, Abraham accepted God’s *substitution* for his son, Isaac. Therefore we read:

**“Abraham went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called that place ‘The Lord will Provide.’** (In the Hebrew, “*Jehovah-Jireh*”). **And to this day it is said, ‘On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided’”** (Gen. 22:13-14).

So the true and living God is indeed **“Jehovah-Jireh, our Provider!”** Hallelujah!

That brings us to our second question: **“How did Jesus redeem us from the curse of the law?”** Answer? He did it **“...by becoming a curse for us.”** So *when* did Jesus pay the penalty for the **“...curse of the law?”** Answer? When He died on the cross for us! It was there on that cross that the **“...curse of the law”** was transferred from us hopeless condemned sinners to the sinless Christ (We will look at this more in a later chapter). The

Apostle Peter echoed this incredible truth when he wrote: **“He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, so that we might die to sin and live for righteousness; for by His wounds you have been healed”** (I Pet. 2:24).

So if Jesus Christ would have died by any other form of execution other than *crucifixion*, these prophetic Scriptures would have not been fulfilled! Only *death by crucifixion* could have fulfilled the Old Testament prophecy: **“Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree”** (Deut. 21:22-23). Therefore, *The Passion of the Christ* was perfectly demonstrated when **“He Himself bore our sins in His body on the TREE!”**

What then do all of these *“prophecies of the cross”* unequivocally prove? First, that Jesus was indeed God’s promised *Messiah* who fulfilled every ancient prophecy in minute detail. Secondly, they prove to any logical objective mind that the Bible is the divinely inspired *Word of God*. It is not just “another religious book.” No single human, or group of people, could ever concoct so many diverse prophecies over several thousands of years – only to see them perfectly fulfilled by another Man centuries later, unless these men were supernaturally *inspired!* That’s why Peter wrote:

**“Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit”** (I Pet. 1:19-21).

Therefore, *The Passion of the Christ* is a dramatic presentation of the fulfillment of the *prophecies of the cross*.

## THE PLAN OF THE CROSS

*Who* planned the cross in the first place?! After reading just the first two chapters in this study, I trust you are beginning to get more of the “BIG PICTURE” about the death of Christ. I hope that you are seeing afresh *Who* was really in control of all of all of these events – right down to the smallest of details? It was the *sovereign God of the universe!*

Therefore, the crucifixion of Christ was not just some capricious act of fate. It was not the manifestation of cruel circumstances befalling an unsuspecting victim. Neither was the crucifixion of Christ the *plan of the Romans* – even though they had perfected this cruel method of capital punishment. Nor was it the *plan of the Jews* – thus anti-Semitism is a totally wrong prejudice – and completely misses the central spiritual point in *The Passion of the Christ*. And it was certainly not the result of some premeditated *plan of the population* who had gone from proclaiming “*Hosanna!*” to “*crucify Him!*” – in less than a week’s time!

*No!* There was another *sovereign hand* and *foreordained plan* that was behind all of these events. This was not just *The Passion of the Christ* that was being revealed. It was first and foremost *The Passion of God!* As we have already seen, He had been planning this *atonement sacrifice* from the eons of eternity past. All of these events – even to the most minute detail, were the sovereign plan of the Triune Godhead of *Father, Son* and *Holy Spirit*.

Contrary to what some people wrongly believe, the old covenant sacrifices – and the crucifixion of Christ, do not reveal a cruel and angry “blood-thirsty God!” Quite the opposite is true! They reveal the *Passion of the Triune God!* Let’s pause to see how each member of the Trinity was involved in the redemption story.

First, as we saw earlier, it was the *passion of God the Father* who made provision for the first substitutionary atonement in the Garden of Eden for Adam and Eve. This was because of His love, mercy and grace – all of which reveal the *Passion of God*. So it was this *passion* of that same *Abba Father*, who “...**so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him would not perish but have eternal life**” (Jn. 3:16).

Secondly, it was the *passion of Christ* that compelled Him to give His life for the sins of the world. When speaking as the “Good Shepherd,” Jesus said:

**“I am the good shepherd...I lay down my life for the sheep...The reason My Father loves Me is that I lay down my life – only to take it up again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of My own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from My Father”**(Jn. 10:14-18).

Thirdly, it was through the *passion of the Holy Spirit* that the atoning sacrifice of Christ took place on the cross. The writer of Hebrews expressed it this way:

**“...Christ...entered the Most Holy Place once for all *by His own blood*, having obtained *eternal redemption...* who, through the *eternal Spirit*, offered Himself unblemished to God...so that we may serve the living God” (Heb. 9:12-14).**

The Apostle Peter further amplified the Spirit’s role with these words:

**“For Christ *died for sins once for all*, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but *made alive by the Spirit...*” (1 Pet. 3:18).**

So if we only see *The Passion of the Christ*, we are only seeing *one third* of the story! The total story is the *Passion of the Father...the Passion of the Son...the Passion of the Spirit!*

I also want you to carefully notice how the ancient Messianic prophecy of Isaiah clearly reveals how the *hand of God* was fulfilling the *plan of God* in the crucifixion. Read this very familiar passage again carefully and prayerfully:

**“He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering...Surely He took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we consider Him *stricken by God, smitten by Him*, and afflicted. But He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities...Yet *it was the Lord’s will to crush Him and cause Him to suffer...*” (Isa. 53:3-5, 10)**

On the Day of Pentecost, Peter preached this same truth to the Jews – many of whom had cried out for the crucifixion of Jesus. Listen to his words...

**“Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through Him, as you yourselves know. *This man was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge*; and you with the help of *wicked men*, put Him to death by nailing Him to the cross” (Acts 2:22-23).**

Later in the Temple Colonnade Peter preached a similar sermon to the Jews:

**“The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His servant Jesus. *You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned Him before Pilate*, though he had decided to let Him go. You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. *You killed the author of life*, but God raised Him from the dead. We are witnesses of this.**

**Now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. But *this is how God fulfilled what He had foretold through all the prophets*, saying that His Christ would suffer. Repent then, and turn to God, so that your sins**

**may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord” (Acts 3:13-19).**

There is one more similar example in Acts. Peter and John had been arrested for continuing to preach about Jesus and His resurrection – directly disobeying the orders of the Jewish leaders. When they were released, they found their fellow believers and made a report. This provoked a spontaneous “prayer and praise service!” Listen to what they prayed:

**“Sovereign Lord, they said, you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David:**

**‘Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and *the rulers gather together against the Lord and against His Anointed One.*’**

**Indeed *Herod and Pontius Pilate* met together with the *Gentiles* and the *people of Israel* in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. *They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.* Now Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus” (Acts 4:24-30).**

In these verses from Acts, we see the mystery of *sovereignty* and *free will* both in operation simultaneously. In reality they are two sides of the same coin. But it is God who holds the coin in His hand – not man! And we have to confess that there is a great mystery here that goes beyond our full comprehension! However, there can be no misunderstanding of the *human role* in the crucifixion of Christ. All of the people are carefully mentioned who took part. Thus, human guilt and culpability cannot be excused or rationalized. But behind all of these humanly orchestrated events, there is the controlling hand of the *sovereign God!* Although he gives freedom for the full expression of the evil of the human heart, at the same time He is still superintending His foreordained will. So in the crucifixion of Christ we see actively at work the *hand of man* and the *Hand of God*. However, God always maintains the ‘upper hand!’

Notice then, how Peter and the disciples clearly acknowledge in their prayer the dual role of man and God in the crucifixion events. He specifically mentions the role of *Herod, Pontius Pilate, the Gentiles, and the Jews*, as they prayerfully recount the crucifixion events. While not minimizing the role and responsibility of the Romans, Jews and Gentiles, they ultimately affirmed the sovereign plan of God that was being fulfilled: **“*They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.*”**

The Apostle Paul affirmed this same truth when he wrote to encourage two young ministers, Timothy and Titus, to be faithful in their calling – even in the face of persecution and

suffering. He reminded both of them that God's plan for the Christ to suffer and die originated *before time began*:

- **“Do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord...join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, who has saved us and called us to a holy life – *not because of anything we have done* but because of His own *purpose and grace*. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus *before the beginning of time*, but has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel”** (II Tim. 1:8-10).
- **“Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ for the faith of God's elect...a faith and knowledge resting on the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, *promised before the beginning of time*, and at His *appointed season* He brought His word to light through the preaching entrusted to me by the command of God our Savior”** (Titus 1:1-3).

So *who* planned the crucifixion of Jesus Christ? Not Herod. Not Pilate. Not the Sanhedrin. Not the Gentiles. *It was God who planned it from the very foundations of the world!* And what God *plans*, God *fulfills* – but in His own time and way. As the Psalmist proclaimed: **“The *plans of the Lord stand firm forever, the purposes of His heart through all generations*”** (Ps. 33:11).

The conclusions then are unmistakable from a Biblical perspective: Jesus Christ was clearly **“...the *Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world*”** (Rev. 13:8)! That's when the first chapter of *The Passion of the Christ* was written.

## THE PLACE OF THE CROSS

As we seek a more holistic Biblical view of *The Passion of the Christ*, we must not overlook any detail – regardless of how small it may seem. Every aspect of this story can teach us valuable spiritual lessons. This is especially true when we take time to examine the “*Place of the Passion.*”

As we look at the specific location of Christ’s crucifixion, we realize very quickly that this was not just *any ol’ place* in Palestine! It was not just some hillside randomly picked by the Romans to hurriedly carry out this unexpected execution. This was a very specific spot that God had been preparing for millennia!

Let me remind you of three very significant historical events that took place in this general *geographical place* – long before the crucifixion of Christ. They involve three of the most important Biblical characters in the Old Testament: *Abraham, David* and *Solomon*.

### ABRAHAM

When we studied *Abraham* in an earlier chapter, I alerted you to the fact that I did not want you to forget the particular *place* where he took his son Isaac, for sacrifice. As you will recall, it was in the “...**region of Moriah**” that he was to go and sacrifice Isaac “...**as a burnt offering on one of the mountains...**” (Gen. 22:2).

We know from the story that it was a three day journey by foot from Beersheba, where he was living at the time. So we read: “**On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance.**” At that time he instructed his servants: “**Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you.**” And we further read that “**Abraham built an altar there.**”

It was on Mt. Moriah then, that Abraham went to “**worship**” through the sacrifice of his beloved son! This story reminds us of the *costliness of worship!* Central to authentic spiritual worship is always an *altar* – a place of *sacrifice* and *death*.

So with and obedience beyond human comprehension, Abraham was about to sacrifice his only son – when God stayed his hand! At that same time, God also provided a *substitutionary sacrifice* to take Isaac’s place on the altar. I don’t want you to overlook here the incredible *faith* that Abraham expressed when said to his servants: “**We will worship and then WE will come back to you.**” Abraham went fully prepared to sacrifice his only son. When Abraham took his son to Mt. Moriah, Isaac was already a *dead man!* Abraham had already put him on the altar...given him up...fully surrendered him. In his mind and heart he was already *dead!*

But Abraham also went to Mt. Moriah fully expecting God to *raise him from the dead!* Listen to this further commentary on the story from the book of Hebrews. The central theme of the story is Abraham’s great faith. The writer begins and ends at that point:

**“By *faith* Abraham, when God tested him, *offered Isaac as a sacrifice*. He who had received the *promises* was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, ‘It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.’ Abraham reasoned that *God could raise the dead*, and figuratively speaking, *he did receive Isaac back from death*” (Heb. 11:17-19).**

Do you see what great *faith* Abraham had in God? Did you notice the significance of that one sentence: **“He who had *received the promises* was about to sacrifice his one and only son.”** As he set out to Mt. Moriah to sacrifice **“...his one and only son,”** Abraham clung to the many **“promises”** that God had previously given him. The greatest promise that Abraham clung to was that God would give him more offspring than the **“stars in the sky”** (Gen. 15:5) – and they would all begin with Isaac! So there was only one possible *faith conclusions*: It Abraham was going to take Isaac’s life – God was going to give it back! And the only possibly way that could happen would be for God to **“...raise the dead!”**

So this first mention of **“Mt. Moriah”** forever sets it apart as *holy ground!* It was the place where God tested Abraham – and he passed the test because of his *passion for God!* This holy mount was the place of *worship... love... faith... sacrifice... death... grace... substitution... resurrection!* And one day it would also be the place of *The Passion of the Christ!*

#### DAVID

A second very significant spiritual event took place in this area during the life of King David. It is recorded in I Chronicles 21. As God increasingly gave him success over his enemies, David became filled with a false sense of pride. He began to secretly entertain the thought that he had done all of these great exploits!

Therefore, against the will of God and contrary to the council of his advisors, David decided to take a census of his people – especially his fighting men. They had grown to the place that they numbered over one million! Not a bad army in anybody’s book! With that knowledge, it would be easy for David to begin to trust in his army rather than in his God. So because this was **“...evil in the sight of God...He punished Israel.”** As a result of God’s judgment through the plague he sent, seventy thousand men died! So because of David’s pride, he lost more men in this judgment by God than he ever lost in battle. It was an extremely costly sin in terms of the loss of human life! But it would be a lesson David would never forget.

As a result of this judgment that fell upon his people, David repented in sackcloth – and fell facedown before God in reverential fear and contrition. In his desperation and despair, David cried out to God:

**“Was it not I who ordered the fighting men to be counted? *I am the one who has sinned and done wrong*. These are but sheep. What have they done? O Lord my God, let your hand fall upon me and my family, but do not let this plague remain on your people” (I Chron. 21:17).**

As a result of his repentance, the judgment hand of the Lord was stayed. At that moment God opened David's spiritual eyes and allowed him to see His angel of judgment who was "...standing at the **threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite**" (v. 15). So the angel of the Lord instructed David to "...go up and build an **altar to the Lord on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite**" (v. 8). And David was obedient. He immediately goes to buy this particular "**threshing floor**" so he can build an altar to the Lord there.

When he gets there "**Araunah was threshing wheat.**" So David says to him:

**"Let me have the site of your threshing floor so I can build an altar to the Lord, that the plague on the people may be stopped. Sell it to me at the full price"** (v.22).

But when Araunah realizes that this was King David, and that he wishes to build an altar to the Lord there, he responds with great generosity:

**"Take it! Let my lord the king do whatever pleases him. Look, I will give the oxen for the burnt offerings, the threshing sledges for the wood, and the wheat for the grain offering. I will give all this"** (v. 23).

Now note very carefully David's response to this very generous offer from Araunah:

**"No, I insist on paying the full price. I will not take for the Lord what is yours, or sacrifice a burnt offering that cost me nothing. So David paid Araunah six hundred shekels of gold for the site"** (v. 24).

**"David built an altar to the Lord there and sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. He called on the Lord, and the Lord answered him with fire from heaven on the altar of burnt offering"** (vs. 25-26).

So we see that David would not accept the threshing floor as a free gift. Nor would he let Araunah provide the animals, grain and wood for the sacrifice. This was *his sin... his disobedience... his problem... his crisis* – not Araunah's! So he insists that he must "...pay the full price" for the threshing floor in order to build an *altar*. David said that he would not "...sacrifice a burnt offering that cost him *nothing*."

That's a great lesson for each of us. *Cheap grace* is never acceptable to a holy God!

Thousands of years later, the greater "...son of David" (Mtt. 22:41-46) would be born – who would be the Messiah. That's why to the Jews the very term "**Son of David**" was synonymous with the Messiah. So at this very *place* where King David made his sacrifice, the Lord Jesus also "**paid the full price**" to stop a greater judgment of God!

But the "**full price**" Jesus would pay would not just be for the people of Israel. It would be for the *whole world*. And the "**full price**" for the sins of the world would not be with "...perishable things like silver and gold." It would be with "...the precious blood of

**Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect”** (I Pet. 1:18). So both King Davids paid the **“full price”** at this place – one in *gold*, one in *blood*!

So it was on Mount Moriah that David’s sin of pride was atoned for on the altar through a *blood sacrifice*. After that the angel of the Lord sheathed his sword. No more judgment. No more plague. No more death. So we read: **“When David saw that the Lord had answered him on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite, he offered sacrifices there”** (v. 28).

But there was still one major problem. The Tabernacle that Moses had built was not there – it was in Gibeon. And the Tabernacle was the proper place for the altar and sacrifices to take place. So David said: **“The house of the Lord God is to be here and also the altar of burnt offering for Israel”** (22:1). From that moment on, David began to make preparations for the building of the Temple of God on that very spot – which brings us to the third Old Testament person associated with this place.

#### SOLOMON

God refused to let King David build the Temple because he was a warrior – a **“man of blood”** (I Chron. 28:3). But he did let him amass a great fortune – along with many of the necessary building materials to pass on to his son Solomon, so that he could build God’s Temple. And where was it built? You guessed it...

**“Then King Solomon began to build the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, where the Lord had appeared to his father David. It was on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite, the place provided by David”** (II Chron. 3:1).

So on *Mount Moriah*, Solomon built the most costly and most beautiful structure ever built by man in human history! And the most sacred *place* of all was the **“Holy of holies”** where the glory of the Lord resided. It would be in this place that God would have his Name to dwell forever (I Kings 5:5; II Chron. 6:6). And since it had been the place of *Abraham’s altar* and *David’s altar*, it would be the final resting place for the *holiest altar of all* – the *Ark of the Covenant*. So after the building was fully completed and the *Ark* was in place, it was again time for *worship*. Time for *sacrifice*. Note the extravagance of their *worship* and *sacrifice*:

**“When the elders of Israel had arrived, the Levites took up the ark, and they brought up the Tent of Meeting and all the sacred furnishings in it. The priests...carried them up; and King Solomon and the entire assembly of Israel that had gathered about him were before the ark, sacrificing so many sheep and cattle that they could not be recorded or counted”** (vs. 4-6).

And it would be somewhere on this same rocky mount that the Lord of glory would make the ultimate sacrifice! It was here that *The Passion of the Christ* would take place! It would be the most extravagant act of worship on the most significant altar in human history – the old rugged cross!

With that brief Old Testament review of the general *place* of the crucifixion, let's turn now to the New Testament. There we gain some more insights about this significant *place* as it is variously described in the Four Gospels:

- **“As they were going out...they came to a place called *Golgotha* (which means *The Place of the Skull*)...And they crucified Him”** (Mtt. 27:33; Mk. 15:22).
- **“When they came to the *place* called the *Skull*, there they crucified him, along with the criminals – one on His right, the other on his left”** (Lk. 23:33).
- **“Carrying His own cross, He went out to the *place* of the *Skull* (which in Aramaic is called *Golgotha*). Here they crucified Him, and with Him two others – one on each side and Jesus in the middle...the *place* where Jesus was crucified was *near the city*...”** (Jn. 19:17-18, 20).

We can clearly see then that all four of the Gospels totally agree on the exact *place* where the crucifixion of Jesus took place. They all referred to it as the **“Place of the Skull.”** And it is referred to in several languages: Latin, Aramaic, Hebrew and Greek. Let's look at each of them more closely:

- Latin: *calva*, *calvarius* or “skull”
- Aramaic: *gulgota*, or “skull”
- Hebrew: *gulgoleth*, or “bald, round, skull-like mound”
- Greek: *kranion*, or “skull”

Why was this *place* called **“The Skull?”** We cannot be absolutely sure. Biblical scholars have given two explanations. First, since it was a known place of execution, some believe that there were human skulls lying around from previous crucifixions – left there as a public warning. This is not likely because of Jewish law that required a dead body to be buried by nightfall (Deut. 21:23).

The more likely and logical explanation is that this rocky knoll in some way had an eerie resemblance to a “human skull.” Although the exact *place* is not known, it is either at the present site of the *Church of the Holy Sepulcher*, or *Gordon's Calvary*. I have visited both sites a number of times. But in both places there is a large “rocky knoll” that would suitably fit the original location. And interestingly enough, they are both a part of the same geological rocky shelf known as **“Moriah.”**

So while we do not know the exact *place* with absolute certainty, we do know the general location. But contrary to a well beloved hymn, we do know that it was not a “hill” or a “mountain” as such. Remember the opening refrain of *The Old Rugged Cross*?

“On a hill far away, stood an old rugged cross,  
The emblem of suffering and shame...”

So while we do know for certain that it was not a tall hill or mountain in the traditional sense of the word, it was in a very *public place*. John specifically tells us that “...**the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city.**” He further points out: “**At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid**” (Jn. 19:41). So this general area seemed to have been a known burial site with gardens all around – not unlike many cemeteries today.

The writer of Hebrews underscores this matter of *location* when He compares the sacrifice of Christ on the cross to the animal sacrifices of the old covenant:

**“The high priest carries the *blood of animals* into the Most Holy Place as a *sin offering*, but the bodies are *burned outside the camp*. And so Jesus suffered *outside the city gate* to make the people holy through *His own blood*. Let us, then, go to Him *outside the camp*, bearing the disgrace He bore”** (Heb. 13:11-13; c.f. Ex. 29:14; Lev. 4:12, 21; 9:11; 16:27).

So we know several things clearly about the *place* of the crucifixion. It was “...**outside the gate.**” It was “...**near the city.**” And nearby “...**there was a garden.**” It had to be “...**outside the city gate**” because it was illegal to crucify a person within the city. So it would have been a very *public place* as close “...**outside the city gate**” as possible. And since there was a “**garden**” with a “**new tomb,**” it must have been a known place of burial. As a result it would have also had some kind of road leading to it.

In carrying out the execution, the Romans would have taken the longest route to get there to draw more public attention. This would have been consistent with the Roman practice of execution. Since crucifixion was their preferred way of *public execution*, they wanted to do it in as *prominent a place* as possible. Therefore the sight of these public executions would serve as a stark visual warning against any form of rebellion against Rome! This would have been much like the “public hangings” practiced in America in years past – as well as in other countries of the world to this day.

So this *place* where Jesus died was a public place of *pain* and *shame*. It had been uniquely prepared through the centuries by God as a place of *worship... sacrifice... judgment... atonement... forgiveness*. It had been hallowed by the sacrifices of Abraham, the sacrifices of David, the sacrifices of Solomon. It became the site for *Solomon’s Temple*, the most costly and beautiful temple ever built. Now it was hallowed by the greatest sacrifice in human history – the sacrifice of the Lord of glory! And through the sacrifice of His life, the *gore of the cross* was transmuted into the *glory of the cross!* So without question, this is the single most important *place* on planet earth! For it was on this *holy mount* that the Lord Jesus *died*, was *buried*, and was *resurrected* from the grave – all for our total redemption!

And finally, it’s probably best that we do not know the *exact spot* where the crucifixion of Christ took place. If we did, people would begin to worship the *place of the cross* rather than the *Person of the cross!* Just as is the case with most of the other “holy places” in Israel today, there would be shrines, temples, churches, altars – all over it! And the

competing religious groups would be “fighting for preeminence” – just as they do today at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher on special holy days like Christmas and Easter!

For the same reason, the *Temple Mount* in Jerusalem is one of the hottest and most contested places on earth! It is the site of the *Western Wall* – the only remaining portion of the Temple. So for the Jews, this is their most holy site in all the earth! It was here that three successive temples were built and destroyed: *Solomon’s Temple*, *Zerubbabel’s Temple* and *Herod’s Temple*. And it is also the site of the *Dome of the Rock* – perhaps the third most holy site for Moslems. Only Mecca and Medina in Saudi Arabia would have more geographical and spiritual importance to the world of Islam than Jerusalem has – which is why there is still constant fighting between Jews and Arabs over the control of the Temple Mount!

So even though we cannot identify the precise *place* where the crucifixion took place, we do know for certain the identification of the *Person* who was crucified there. So let’s turn our attention more specifically to the *Person* of the *passion*.

## THE PERSON OF THE CROSS

This is the cardinal question of this study: “*Who was the person of the passion?*” After all, the Romans had crucified untold numbers of people before and after Christ’s crucifixion. What made Him so unique? What made His passion any different than the normal human passion that every other person went through who was crucified?

The word *passion* comes from the Latin word, *passio*, and means “to endure, to suffer, to agonize.” To a certain extent every human being experiences *passion* to some degree in his or her life. This is especially true for the millions down through the centuries who have *innocently suffered* because of the sins of others. But this word *passion* would be especially descriptive of every person who was crucified – including the two thieves on either side of Jesus. They too were experiencing the *passion* of crucifixion. So what made *The Passion of the Christ* so different?

To find the answer to that question we come to the very heart of the identity of the Person of Jesus Christ. In fact, *His heart* is the real *heart of the question!* Was *His heart* like every other *human heart* in history? Or was His heart different? Of course His *physical heart* was just like every other human heart – beating, pulsating and pumping blood. But what was the nature of His *spiritual heart*? Was it *sinful* or *sinless*? Was it *guilty* or *guiltless*? Was it *polluted* or *pure*? Was it *defiled* or *holy*? Was it the *heart of man* or was it the *heart of God*? Or was it *both*?

To answer this question, we come to the seminal issue of the *nature* of Jesus Christ. “*Who was – or is, He?*” The answer to that question determines whether you see Him as just another religious leader in history, or as totally unique. Your conclusions will determine for you whether Jesus has spiritual equals and contemporaries among the founders of other world religions, or whether He is peerless. The answer you come to will determine in your mind whether He is “one among many” – or the “One and only!” And it all goes back to this central question of “*Who is the Person of the passion?*”

What then, was the *nature* of Jesus? What was His true *identity*? What made *His passion* unlike any other *human passion* in history? The clear Biblical answer is this: *Jesus had two natures*. Like all of us, He had a *human nature*. But unlike any of us, He also had a *divine nature*. That’s why He is referred to theologically as the only *Theoanthropic* Person in history. This description comes from the combination of two words: *theos*, or God; and *anthropos*, or man. So Jesus Christ is the unique *God-Man* of history. As such He was the unique *Incarnation* of the One and only God. As John said of Him: “**The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us**” (Jn. 1:14). So Jesus Christ was *God-in-the-flesh*. At one and the same time He was *fully God* and *fully man*. Jesus Christ was both the *Son of God* and *God the Son*. This fact totally separates Him from every other religious figure in human history!

There is certainly a spiritual mystery here that we cannot fully comprehend. This truth is part of the mystery of the *Trinity*, or *tri-unity* of God. In teaching about this I often say:

*“If we could fully comprehend this mystery about the Godhead, we would be a part of it! Indeed, we would be the fourth member of the Trinity! But unless we have a psychotic God-complex and are suffering from delusions of megalomania, we know that we are not divine as Jesus was divine! We know that we are not God! However, mental hospitals and psych wards are filled with people who are suffering from those kinds of delusions of spiritual grandeur! But no normal person would ever entertain such thoughts.”*

Since this doctrine of the *Trinity* and the *Incarnate God* are contrary to human nature and reasoning, they can only come through divine revelation. So the doctrine of the *Trinity* and the doctrine of the *Incarnation*, are clearly *revealed truths* from the Bible. And while they are *beyond reason*, they are not *against reason*. These concepts elevate us from the limitations of *human reason* into the realm of *divine revelation*.

Therefore, it is the *two natures of Christ* that make *His passion* absolutely unique in human history. Properly understood, there was *one Man with two natures* who died on the cross over two thousand years ago. There was the *historical Person* and there was the *spiritual Person*. There was the *Man of flesh* and there was the *Man of spirit*. There was the *Son of Mary* and the *Son of God*. There was *Jesus of Nazareth* and there was *Christ – the Messiah*.

And since both natures experienced *death* on the cross for you and me, let's probe this spiritual mystery a bit further. Through Scripture, let's briefly examine the *two natures... two identities... two persona* who experienced the *passion* of crucifixion. As a result, this portion of our study will bring us to a closer examination of the *names* that are used to describe Jesus

Names in the Bible are *very significant*. So in your study of the Bible, never gloss over any name. Take a few minutes to look up its meaning. Generally speaking, *name represented nature*. So a person's *name* reflected something important about their *nature*, or the *nature of the circumstances* that surrounded their birth. Therefore, when we come to the *Person of the Passion*, we must carefully study the two primary *names* associated with Him: **“Jesus”** and **“Christ.”**

In reality the first is His actual *name*, and the second His *title*. So generally speaking, the *name “Jesus”* refers to His *human nature*, and the *title “Christ”* relates to His *divine nature*. **“Jesus”** reminds us of His *human origin*, while **“Christ”** reminds us of His *divine origin*. It is like saying *President George Bush* or *Queen Elizabeth*. One is their *title* and the other is their *name*.

Unfortunately, many people with some basic Biblical background are often so familiar with those terms and titles that they overlook their significance. On the other hand, those with little or no Biblical framework are even more confusions by those names and titles. That's why the Bible constantly warns about **“false prophets”...“false Christs”...“anti-Christ”...and “other Jesuses”** (Mtt. 24:23; II Cor. 11:4; Gal. 1:7; II Pet. 2:1-19; I Jn. 3:18; 4:1; Jude 5-13, Rev. 2:9, etc). Most of the major world religions have some erroneous

teaching about Christ. And every *cult* has its “counterfeit Jesus” that it deceives people by. So for millions of people inside and outside the church, the term “**Jesus Christ**” is almost like saying *John Doe*! So let’s pause to examine His names more closely.

- **Jesus:** This name in the Greek is *Iesous*, and it is a transliteration of the Hebrew name, *Joshua*, meaning “Jehovah is Salvation” or “Jehovah is Savior.” It was a very common name among the Jews in both the Old Testament and New Testament times (Ex. 17:9; Lk. 3:29; Col. 4:11, etc). This was the human name that was given to Jesus by Mary and Joseph in obedience to angelic instruction: “...**you are to give Him the name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins**” (Mtt. 1:21; Lk. 1:31). So it is proper for us to refer to “**Jesus**” as His *human name* – but certainly with clear divine overtones.
- **Christ:** Properly understood, this is not a name but a *title*, as I stated earlier. It is from the Greek word *Christos*, and means “Anointed One” or “Messiah.” This is especially true when it is preceded by the definite article *ho Christos*, meaning “**The Christ.**” There are three specific times when Jesus clearly affirmed this title for Himself: First to Peter in Caesarea Philippi (Mtt. 16:17). Secondly to the Samaritan woman at the well (Jn. 4:26). Thirdly, at His trial before the Sanhedrin (Mk. 14:61-62).

And in the third incident, it was Jesus’ clear affirmation before the High Priest and Sanhedrin that He indeed was *ho Christos*, or “**the Christ,**” that got Him condemned to death! In their minds Jesus was clearly *claiming to be God* – which was *blasphemy*, and required the death sentence! So whether or not Pilate understood the spiritual significance of this claim – all of the Jewish leaders clearly did. And they condemned Jesus to death for claiming that *title* for Himself – and not being willing to recant it in the face of the cross!

So this title “**Christ,**” whether used by Jesus, by His disciples, or by His enemies – clearly denoted *God’s anointed...God’s Messiah...God’s one and only Son* (Mtt. 2:4; 22:42; 23:8-10; 24:5; 26:63-68; Lk. 3:15; 4:41; Jn. 1:41; 3:28; 6:69; 9:22; 10:24; 12:34; Acts 2:30-38; Rom. 5:6-8, etc). And it was even more emphatic and significant when the Biblical writers expanded this title to “**Jesus the Christ,**” or “**...the Lord’s Christ**” (Mtt. 16:20; Mk. 8:29; Lk. 2:26; Acts 4:26; 18:28; 26:23, etc).

In light of that fact, carefully note how John the Beloved – who was the disciple closest to Jesus, summarizes the purpose of his Gospel:

**“Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name”** (Jn. 20:30-31).

What an incredible summary from the man who knew Jesus the most intimately!  
Those verses reveal to us the *passion of John* about the Lord Jesus Christ – whom  
he *passionately loved!*

It is also important for us to note that these two words are sometimes used almost interchangeably. For all of the Biblical writers the *name* and *title* became synonymous. That's because most of them had intimately known the *human Jesus* during the three brief years of His public earthly ministry. But through His miracles and resurrection, they had come to believe in His *divine nature* – and each of them ultimately *staked their lives on it!* As a result we will find them often using the compound names “**Jesus Christ**” or “**Christ Jesus**” – and the references are far too numerous to even list (Mtt. 1:1; 1:18; Mk. 1:1; Jn. 1:17; 17:3; Acts 2:38; 5:24; 10:38; 19:4, Rom. 1-6 etc). In their minds, the use of this compound name was like saying: “*Jesus is the Christ*” and “*The Christ is Jesus.*”

For the sake of even further emphasis, they would also often expand this appellation to the “**Lord Jesus Christ**” (Lk. 2:11; Acts 11:17; 15:11; 16:31; 20:21; 28:31; Rom. 5:1, 21; Gal. 6:18; Eph. 1:3, etc).

But as we have already seen, Jesus always got into trouble with the religious leaders when He affirmed that He was indeed “**the Christ.**” By using that term to describe Himself, these religious leaders clearly understood that Jesus was calling Himself “**The Messiah,**” the specially “**Anointed One**” who had been sent from God! As we have already pointed out, that's what got Him crucified (Mk. 14:61-63)! It's because Jesus unashamedly embraced that title that we have *The Passion of the Christ!* Note carefully then, this final cross-examination of Jesus by the high priest when he put Jesus under an *oath* and asked Him this question:

**“I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are *the Christ*, the Son of God.”**

**‘Yes, it is as you say,’ Jesus replied”** (Mtt. 26:63-64).

That affirmation sealed His fate through death by crucifixion!

Therefore, according to the *flesh*, He was simply known as “**the son of Joseph**” or “**the Carpenter's son**” (Mtt. 13:55; Mk. 6:3; Lk. 3:23; Jn. 6:42). This was the *historical person* who also had *siblings* who are specifically named: “**James, Joseph, Simon and Judas.**” And though not named, Matthew also speaks of “**...his sisters**” (Mat. 13:55). So Jesus had at least four brothers and two sisters – maybe more.

It is important to note in passing that this is one of the facts that separate the Catholic Church from Protestants because they teach the ‘perpetual virginity of Mary.’ This is a spurious doctrine solely based upon Papal tradition and found nowhere in the Bible. Matthew's Gospel clearly tells us that Joseph “**...took Mary home as his wife. But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son**” (Matt. 1:24-25). The clear inference is that *after* Jesus was born, Joseph and Mary had normal sexual relationships like every other

married couple, resulting in the conception and birth of several other brothers and sisters – who were the human siblings of Jesus.

The most common human name however, for Jesus was “**Jesus of Nazareth.**” That’s because Nazareth was the town He grew up in. It was from here that He left the carpenter’s shop to launch His public ministry as a peripatetic preacher, teacher and healer. As a result, He was often called “**Rabbi**” or *teacher* (Mtt. 26:25, 49; Jn. 1:38, 49; 3:2, etc). So the designation and title of “**Jesus of Nazareth**” was associated with Him both *before* and *after* His passion and resurrection (Mtt. 4:13; 21:11; 26:71; Mk. 1:24; 10:47; 16:6; Lk. 4:34; 18:37; 24:19; Jn. 1:45; 18:5; Acts 2:26; 3:6; 4:10; 6:14; 10:38; 22:8; 26:9, etc).

It was also this common title of “**Jesus of Nazareth**” that Pilate had inscribed on the cross – most probably above Christ’s head. Much to the disdain of the Jewish leaders, the notice read: “**Jesus of Nazareth, The King of the Jews**” (Jn. 19:19-22). So to the Jewish religious leaders, the title of “**The Christ**” or “**The King of the Jews**” as related to Jesus was anathema! Because He was crucified in such a public place, they beseeched Pilate to change the inscription of judgment from “**The King of the Jews**” to “**...this man claimed to be the king of the Jews.**” But to show his utter disdain for them and this unjust trial, Pilate tersely responded: “**What I have written, I have written**” (Jn. 19:19-21).

It is helpful then for our understanding, to relate this title “**Jesus of Nazareth**” to the *historical Person*. As we think of this title we reflect upon Christ’s *human nature*. And through His passion, we see the full range of expression of the *human nature* of this *historical person* – as we will see more in another chapter.

But according to the *Spirit*, we should think of Jesus as “**The Christ**”... “**The Anointed One**” ...“**the Son of Man**”...“**the Son of God.**” It is again important to note that the title that Jesus frequently used of Himself is the “**Son of Man.**” This is especially true in the Gospel of Matthew. As we saw in an earlier chapter, this was a clearly understood *Messianic Title* to the Jewish people, going back to the prophecy of Daniel (Dan. 7:13). Since Matthew was a Jew writing for Jews, it is significant that he often quotes Jesus’ use of this title for Himself (Mtt. 8:20; 12:8, 32, 40; 16:13; 27-28; 17:9; 19:28).

It should not be surprising then, that this title “**Son of Man**” is also used most often by Jesus through His betrayal and trial. Even though all of the Jews clearly understood it as a Messianic title, many today do not have that understanding. Note three instructive examples:

- In the Garden at His arrest: “**The hour has come. Look, the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners...here comes My betrayer**” (Mk. 14:41-42).
- To Judas at his betrayal: “**Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?**” (Lk. 22:48).
- To the High Priest and Sanhedrin: “**I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the**

**clouds of heaven.”** Upon hearing that the High Priest tore his cloths and said: **“He has spoken blasphemy!”** (Mtt. 26:64-65; Mk. 14:62; Lk 22:69).

Therefore, it was only because of His *divine nature* that Jesus could clearly know in advance *how* He was going to die by being **“...lifted up.”** It was only because He was the **“Son of God”** – and knew it, that He could be interpreting the events happening to Him through the many prophecies being precisely fulfilled. Look at several examples:

- When He was being sought by the temple soldiers in the Garden, John records: **“Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to Him, went out and asked them, ‘Who is it you want?’”** (Jn. 18:4). In the face of the fear in the faces of His disciples Jesus said: **“If you are looking for Me, let these men go.”** ***This happened so that the words He had spoken would be fulfilled: I have not lost one of those you gave Me”*** (Jn. 18:8-9; c.f. Jn. 6:39; 17:12).
- And when they were arresting Him He said: **“This has all taken place that the writings of the prophets might be fulfilled”** (Matt. 26:56; Mk. 14:49).
- When Peter tried to defend Jesus with a sword, He said: **“Put your sword back in its place...for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. Do you think I cannot call on My Father, and He will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels.”** ***But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way”*** (Matt. 26:52-54).
- Finally, when He was acquitted by Pilate but condemned to crucifixion by the Jews, we read: **“This happened so that the words Jesus had spoken indicating the kind of death He was going to die would be fulfilled”** (Jn. 18:32).

So Jesus had no *identity crisis* going to the cross! He knew *Who He was* and *Whose He was!* He also knew *where* He had come from – and *where He was going.* And just as His knowledge of Scripture had carried Him through His early temptations in the wilderness (Lk. 4:1-13), so they guided Him through the hours of His trials before His death!

Humanly speaking then, Jesus knew that He had been **“...born in Bethlehem”** to Joseph and Mary (Lk. 1:27; 2:1-20; 3:23). He also knew that He had grown up in Nazareth, so **“...He was called a Nazarene”** (Mtt. 2:23). But He also had an acute awareness that He was **“the Son of Man”** who had **“...come down out of heaven”** (Jn. 3:13; 31; 6:33, 50, 62). And it was because of this *heavenly nature* that He had supernatural insight into the events He was living out and fulfilling.

By human reckoning then, He knew He was dying as **“Jesus, son of Joseph.”** But by divine reckoning He knew He was dying as the **“The Christ”** – the **“Son of God!”** He clearly understood that as **“God’s anointed Messiah,”** He was dying for the sins of the world. (Note the *Summary Chart* at the end of this chapter)

So “**the Christ**” that “**Jesus of Nazareth**” revealed was totally unacceptable to the Jewish leaders. In their minds, a “suffering Messiah” was a contradiction of terms. A “dying Messiah” just could not be God’s plan! That kind of Messiah just did not meet their fixed expectations. In their interpretation of the Scriptures, the Messiah they expected was going to be a *Conquering King* – not a *Suffering Servant!* But as Jesus would teach the two on the Emmaus Road after His resurrection...

**“How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the *Christ have to suffer* these things and then enter His glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, *He explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself*” (Lk. 24:26-27).**

And later that same resurrection day, Jesus held another Bible Class for His disciples – more fully explaining the same truths to them:

**“This is what I told you while I was still with you. *Everything must be fulfilled that is written about Me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms*” (Lk. 24:44).**

Is it any wonder then that Peter boldly preached this truth about the resurrected Jesus on the Day of Pentecost? Listen to his authoritative convicting sermon to many of the very same people who helped condemn Jesus to death. And especially note how he weaves together the various names and titles of Jesus:

**“Men of Israel, listen to this: *Jesus of Nazareth* was a man accredited by God to you my miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through Him, as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge, and you, with the help of wicked men, put Him to death by nailing Him to the cross...But God has raised this *Jesus* to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. Exalted to the right hand of God, He has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear...Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this *Jesus*, whom you crucified, *both Lord and Christ.*”**

What was the crowd’s reaction to this bold message? **“When the people heard this, they were *cut to the heart* and said to Peter and the other Apostles, ‘*Brothers, what shall we do?*’ To that question Peter replied: “*Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*” (Acts 2:22-38). As a result of the *power of that Name* and the *forgiveness of that Name*, three thousand people gave their lives to Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world!**

Even in the face of opposition and persecution by the same Sanhedrin that had condemned Jesus to death, the Apostles would not compromise their message about *The Passion of the Christ*. After they had been forbidden to “...**speak in the name of Jesus,**” they were released from their arrest. What was their response? Compromise? Tone down their

preaching? Water down their teaching? Switch to a more politically correct message? No! Listen to this incredible response:

**“The apostles left the Sanhedrin, *rejoicing* because they had been counted *worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name*. Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that *Jesus is the Christ*” (Acts 5:40-42).**

Before his own conversion, the Apostle Paul had been a member of that same hostile Sanhedrin. He too was totally antagonistic to the Name of Jesus Christ – and wanted to eradicate it from the face of Palestine! But after his own radical conversion on the Damascus Road **“...he began to preach in the synagogues that *Jesus is the Son of God*.”**

Doctor Luke further recounts Saul’s bold transformation and about-face by saying: **“Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that *Jesus is the Christ*” (Acts 9:20-22).** There is no plausible explanation for this kind of *total reversal* of worldview by Saul other than his personal encounter with the resurrected Christ on the Road to Damascus! It was so radical that his name was changed from *Saul* to *Paul*!

Later in his life, Paul looked back on the events of the crucifixion and gave these words of commentary:

**“We speak of God’s secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory *before time began*. None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory” (1 Cor. 2:7-8).**

And the tragedy is, most of the **“rulers of this age”** still don’t understand who Jesus Christ is! That’s because they are limited by the “world’s wisdom” – which is foolishness, rather by “God’s wisdom” – which is revealed in His *Living Word* and *Written Word*! As a result, they either *cannot* or *will not* understand *The Passion of the Christ*!

**SUMMARY CHART  
OF  
JESUS CHRIST  
“One Person; Two Natures”  
(Theo-Anthropic)**

**HUMANITY: JESUS**

**“Jesus of Nazareth”**

**DEITY: CHRIST**

**“Jesus the Christ”**

**The Carpenter's Son**

**Son of Joseph & Mary**

**From Earth**

**Natural Man**

**Man of Flesh**

**Master**

**Servant**

**Fully Man**

**King of the Jews**

**The Son of God**

**Son of Man**

**From Heaven**

**Spiritual Man**

**Man of Spirit**

**Messiah**

**Savior**

**Fully God**

**King of the Universe**

***JESUS CHIST IS LORD!***