



## Chapter 22

# ***THE SURPRISING CAUSE OF JESUS' DEATH***

Jesus was certainly crucified by the Romans but his death came about in a far different way than is normally supposed. The fact is, he did not die by crucifixion alone. Recall that Pilate wondered whether Jesus had died so early because it was usually an hour or so before sundown that the Jewish authorities broke the legs of those crucified in order to kill them. But it was reported to Pilate that Jesus had died about two hours earlier than this (Mark 15:44). Something else caused Jesus to die more quickly, and it presents us with a terrifying spectacle of what actually happened to him.

In one way, I almost wish we could be spared a knowledge of what took place at his crucifixion. It was most gruesome, and sad. But there is no use hiding our heads in the sand concerning the sufferings that Jesus endured. After all, the description of what happened is recorded in the Holy Scriptures (though overlooked by many people throughout the last 1500 years) and for that reason it is essential that each of us knows what occurred at that Passover season in A.D.30. When it is fully understood, it is truly a heart-breaking and horrendous scene. But the New Testament records

that a triumph and victory emerged because of the resurrection of Jesus and his subsequent exaltation to supreme power at the very throne of God the Father.

To understand just what punishment Jesus underwent, it is necessary to recall a prime scripture that is found in Isaiah's prophecy about the Suffering Servant recorded from Isaiah 52:13 to 53:12. The principal verse that allows us to comprehend the full meaning of the prophecy is given at its beginning in Isaiah 52:14.

"As many were astonished at thee; his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men."

Also coupled with this description of the Suffering Servant is a further prophetic account in Psalm 22 (personified in the sufferings of King David). Notice Psalm 22:16,17.

"For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and feet, I may tell all my bones: they look and stare at me."

While it appears that David applied Psalm 22 as belonging to himself in an allegorical sense, it was seen by the apostles as having a literal fulfillment in the person of Jesus. It is interesting, however, that these verses are usually not fully applied today in connection with Jesus' crucifixion. But let us do so. Coupling these two sections of the Bible together (as certainly was done by the writers of the New Testament) gives us a further indication to the type of death that Jesus encountered. Had there been no literal application of these verses above to Jesus it is difficult to see how the apostles could have defended them as describing the role of Jesus at his crucifixion (which, of course, was quite *literal*).

### ***The Real Prophetic Descriptions of the Crucifixion of Jesus***

If these prophetic descriptions in Isaiah and the Psalms are to be literally interpreted (and it appears that they were by the apostles) then we have the characterization of a man who was not only crucified but one who had some of his flesh so torn away from his

bones that people looking upon him after his ordeal could hardly tell he was a human being. As Isaiah said: His visage was so marred more than any man (Isaiah 52:14). Even the bones of his body were able to be seen penetrating outward through his skin (not simply observed under his skin). The text means that even his bare bones themselves were being exposed because so much skin and flesh had been rent away from them.

This is what the prophet Isaiah was saying in his description of the Suffering Servant. His flesh was to be so mangled and his body so disfigured that it was almost impossible to recognize him as being a normal human (Isaiah 52:14). What did his tormentors do to him (other than simple crucifixion) that much skin and flesh were torn away from the parts of his body facing them? I realize that such a description may seem offensive to some people, but it is time for all of us to take stock of what the scriptural revelation actually says and not be squeamish about the truth of the crucifixion scene. The prophet Isaiah described the Suffering Servant with his visage and form marred more than any man. Some people may find it distasteful to imagine Jesus in this fashion, but that is what Isaiah wrote and it seems reasonable to accept his description. The apostles certainly did, and several of them were also eyewitnesses to the crucifixion.

### ***The Terrible Judgment on the Suffering Servant***

What type of judicial punishment could produce such an awful description of the Suffering Servant? The scourging that Jesus was subjected to before his crucifixion cannot account for such mangling since Pilate intended to let him go after the soldiers had chastised him, and from this it shows that Pilate fully believed he would recover (Luke 23:22). No, it was not the beatings that Jesus endured under the abuse of the soldiers. There is really only one type of execution that could fit the scriptural descriptions (which was a common one in Jerusalem at the time). Interestingly, it is the only kind of punishment that the Mosaic legislation allowed for capital

crimes. What we find in these prophecies is a classic portrayal of a person who was pelted with stones.

There is no doubt that Jesus experienced the torment of volleys of small, sharp stones thrown at the front parts of his naked body while he was nailed to the tree of crucifixion. The stones were hurled at his face, at his mid-section and his legs. These must have been like sharp flintstones (many of which are on the Mount of Olives) that would break the skin and dislodge the flesh but without the force to break his bones. Such volleys of stones hitting his body persistently for almost six hours could produce the description of Isaiah: "As many were astonished at thee: his visage [his outward appearance] was *so marred* more than any man, and his form [*so marred*] more than the sons of man."

### ***Old Testament Law Required the Execution by Stoning a Person***

In the Old Testament stoning was the only type of execution that was prescribed for those committing capital crimes. Notice what Hasting's *Dictionary of the Apostolic Church* says about the Old Testament legislation concerning stoning.

"Stoning was the pelting of stones by a mob at a person who had merited their ill-will (Exo.8:26; 17:4; II Chron.24:20ff; cf. Heb.11:37; Acts 5:26) or the infliction of the death penalty by stoning (Lev.20:2; Deut.13:10). The method which an enraged crowd took of executing vengeance with the weapons lying readiest to their hand came to be employed afterwards as a regular and legal method of inflicting the death sentence on a criminal. Stoning is the *ONLY* form of capital punishment recognized in the *Mosaic Law*" (vol.II, pp.528,529 emphases mine).

In the time when Jesus was put to death, the Romans forbade the people of Judaea from applying the death penalty on anyone (John 18:31). It was Pilate who had the only authority to execute Jesus and the Roman method for crimes against the state for non-Romans was normally by crucifixion. And, without doubt, Jesus was indeed

crucified to a tree in the Roman fashion. But there was much more to Jesus' death than a simple crucifixion. Pilate also permitted the authorities in Jerusalem to kill him according to biblical law. He told them to "take ye him and judge him according to your law" (John 18:31). This was an extraordinary allowance because it subjected Jesus to suffer both the Roman method of execution for terrible crimes (the Gentile practice) but it also gave permission to the people of Jerusalem to pelt him with stones in the scriptural (Mosaic) manner. In Leviticus 24:15-18 Moses commanded that all Israelites and aliens in sight of a blasphemer should take up stones and stone the profane and ungodly person to death. The Hebrew actually means that Israel was to overwhelm the criminal with countless volleys of stones being thrown at his naked body (Rashi, *Commentary*, vol.II, p.111).

### ***The Crime of Blasphemy was Punished by Stoning***

It should be remembered that the crime which the authorities in Jerusalem charged against Jesus was that of blasphemy (Mark 14:64). This was the most dastardly crime imaginable to the people of Judaea. And the official judgment against him made him worthy of death in the most despicable fashion (Matthew 26:65,66). It is interesting that it was Jesus' claim that he was the Son of God that made the authorities proclaim him a blasphemer. With such a terrible charge against him, the leaders went to Pilate and asked him to allow Jesus to be killed in the manner prescribed by the Law of Moses. "We have a law, and by that law he ought to die, because he has made himself the Son of God" (John 19:7). To the authorities, Jesus' appraisal of himself was tantamount to blasphemy. The law that they were referring to was that of Leviticus 24:16.

"And he that blasphemeth the name of the Lord [Yahweh], he shall surely be put to death, and all the congregation shall certainly stone him: as well as the stranger, as he that is born in the land, when he blasphemeth the name of the Lord, shall be put to death."

Thus, all the residents of the land (Jews and Gentiles alike) were

required to barrage the blasphemer with volleys of stones. During the time of Jesus' ministry, many of the people who did not like his teaching had several times tried to carry out this Mosaic Law against Jesus. "Then they took up stones to cast at him: but Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple, going throughout the midst of them, and so passed by" (John 8:59). "Then the Jews took up stones again to stone him. Jesus answered them, many good works have I showed you from my Father; for which of those works do you stone me? The Jews answered him, saying, For a good work we stone you not; but for blasphemy; and because you, being a man, make yourself God" (John 10:31-33). The fact is, time and again the authorities were trying to kill him by stoning. "His disciples say unto him, Master, the Jews of late sought to stone you; and go you [to Jerusalem] again?" (John 11:8).

### ***The Common People knew that Stoning was the Means for Execution***

It is made clear in the Gospel record that the people who were hostile to Jesus were looking for every opportunity to stone him for his blasphemy (as they considered it). And they finally got their wish when they went to Pilate and said: "We have a law, *and by THAT LAW* he ought to die" (John 19:7). And Pilate acquiesced to their wishes. "Take you him *and judge him ACCORDING TO YOUR LAW*" (John 18:31). [Note that all the references in the previous paragraph about the people desiring him to be *stoned*, are found in the Gospel of John which records the appeal of the authorities to Pilate to have Jesus killed according to the Law of Moses. And this type of capital punishment was, of course, by stoning. There can be no doubt that this is what the authorities in Jerusalem were petitioning Pilate for permission to do. And Pilate gave the allowance.]

It should be realized that when the one being stoned was charged with the most heinous of crimes, such as blasphemy, then it was common for the stoning to be done with as much humiliation upon

the person as possible. The main part of the anatomy towards which the stones were hurled was to the face and eyes. Jesus himself stated that the stoning of an individual was normally for people to cast the stones at the head. "And again he sent unto them another servant: and at him they cast stones, *and wounded him in the head*" (Mark 12:4). It was to the head and the eyes that the stones were predominantly thrown, at least in the initial stages of the execution. Indeed, in Psalm 38 (one of the Psalms of David which reflects in a typical way what David's son, the Messiah, would have to suffer), it is stated that the person so described *was to be blinded* (see particularly verse 10 and read through verse 14). This was a section of Scripture that even the prophet Isaiah later quoted regarding the Suffering Servant (Isaiah 53:7). There can hardly be a doubt that sometime during those six hours of being barraged by stones, several of the stones hit his eyes and Jesus was blinded by them.

### ***Prophecy in the Old Testament Demanded that Jesus be Stoned***

The fact that Jesus was stoned to satisfy the prophecy of Isaiah 52:14 that his appearance and form would be *marred* more than any man also helps to explain another New Testament reference that has long puzzled scholars. When Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper on the eve of his crucifixion, he took bread and *broke* it and he said this *breaking* was like his body would be *broken* for them (Matthew 26:26). He spoke of the *breaking* of his body in the same context as the wine which represented his blood which was shed at his crucifixion for the remission of sins. But it has baffled scholars how *breaking off* pieces of flat and crispy bread just like the unleavened bread that Jews eat at Passover today called *matzos* could in any way represent the body of Jesus at his crucifixion? Since the New Testament specifically states that no bones in his body would be broken (John 19:36), many scholars can see no reference whatever to the death of Jesus in the *breaking* of the unleavened bread. To many of them they feel that the breaking of bread must only refer

to a ceremony at fellowship meals without any significance in regard to the crucifixion of Jesus. But many early Christians did not view it that way at all. Let us look at what early Christians thought.

There are a number of Greek manuscripts and writings of several Church Fathers which provide a comment of explanation to the text of First Corinthians 11:24 concerning the *breaking* of the bread at the Lord's Supper and they associated it with the *breaking* of Jesus' body at his crucifixion. They added their comments that the bread represented Jesus' body: "*which is broken for you*" (see *The Greek New Testament*, UBS, p.604). This means that there were early beliefs that the *broken bread* in the ceremony of the Lord's Supper did indeed represent the *broken body* of Jesus at the time of his crucifixion. For one thing, in the prophecy of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 52:13 to 53:12 there was the statement in Hebrew that the person of the prophecy would be *broken* for our iniquities (*bruised*: King James). There is no question that the Hebrew word *dahchah* in Isaiah 53:5 means *broken* (cf. Isaiah 19:10).

### ***The Body of Jesus had to be Broken Open with his Flesh Exposed***

Thus, we have the beliefs of early Christians and the prophecy of Isaiah itself that Jesus' body would indeed be *broken* like *breaking off* pieces of unleavened bread. But the scourging of the soldiers before his crucifixion or the simple act of crucifixion itself could not account for such *breaking off* of pieces of his body. But the act of *stoning* would fit the description precisely. The hurling of small and sharp stones at Jesus' body would tear away pieces of his flesh ever so slowly until after about six hours of such treatment he would have been hanging on the tree of crucifixion as a person whose visage and form would have been so marred that he would not have resembled a normal human any longer. This is how Isaiah 52:14 describes the Suffering Servant, whom all the New Testament writers identified with Jesus, and I see no reason for not believing it. This is just another evidence that Jesus met his death



by *stoning* (his body torn to shreds in its frontal areas) and that he did not die from the crucifixion alone.

The apostle Paul was fully aware that Jesus was not only crucified in the Roman fashion of execution but he knew that the main reason for his death (and punishment) was through the Israelite method of stoning. In Paul's classic statement that Jesus had become a curse for us, he did not mean that it was simply by crucifixion alone that he had become such an accursed thing. Note what he said in Galatians 3:13.

“Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangs on a tree.”

The apostle Paul was in no way intending his quote, concerning the application of the Mosaic Law in the death of Jesus, as pertaining to the Roman method of crucifixion alone. Paul selected the scripture in Deuteronomy 21:23 as describing Jesus' death for another reason. Anyone who is acquainted with the Old Testament legislation is well aware that Moses in this reference was in no way speaking about hanging someone on a tree *in order to kill him*. On the contrary, Moses ordered the authorities within Israel to hang the corpse of the accursed one on a tree with ropes *AFTER* the person had already been killed by *STONING*. Notice the quote in full that the apostle Paul referred to. It had nothing to do with killing a person by the Roman method of crucifixion, and no such thing was in Moses' mind. Moses meant simply to hang the corpse on a tree *after* the stoning.

“And all the men of his city shall stone him with stones that he die: so shall you put evil away from among you; and all Israel shall hear and fear. And if a man have committed a sin worthy of death, and he be to be put to death, and you hang him on a tree: and his body shall not remain all night on the tree, but you shall certainly bury him that day (for he that hangs is accursed of God), that your land be not defiled, which the Lord your God gives you for an inheritance” (Deuteronomy 21:21-23).

Paul realized that though Jesus was indeed crucified in the Roman manner (and this contributed to his death), it was actually the stoning by the people of Jerusalem (both by Jews and Gentiles as the Law of Moses required) that caused his death. And while the original Mosaic legislation stated that the Israelites should first stone a blasphemer to death and *then* hang him on a tree until near sunset, in the case of Jesus it was Pilate who first nailed him to a tree and then he allowed the people at Jerusalem to stone him. Even using this reversal technique (first hanging on a tree and *then* stoning the criminal) was utilized by the people in Jerusalem within the first century. We now have new discoveries from the Dead Sea area that fully demonstrate this fact with certainty. The Jewish authorities in the first century had re-evaluated the strict wording of Deuteronomy 21: 21-23 and they were now interpreting it in the reverse order. The hanging could take place before the stoning.

### ***The Old Testament also Required the Blasphemer be Hanged on a Tree***

It is now proved that blasphemers and traitors were sometimes *first* hanged on a tree and *then* they were killed. One of the important Dead Sea Scrolls is called The Temple Scroll. The late Yigael Yadin wrote a major work about the contents of this scroll and there is an English version of the full text provided by Johann Maier (edited by Clines and Davies). These scholars were surprised to find a reference in Column 64 of the text that spoke about hanging traitors on a tree *and THEN* they would be killed while they were suspended from the tree. I will quote the section of the scroll concerning this important point.

“If a man informs against his people, and delivers up his people to a foreign nation, and does harm to his people, *you shall hang him on a tree, and he shall die....* And if a man has committed a crime punishable by death, and has defected into the midst of the nations, and has cursed his people and the children of Israel, *you shall hang him also on the tree, and he shall die*” (emphases mine).

Both Yadin and Maier considered that these texts in the *Temple Scroll* which spoke about Israelite executions were referring to crucifixions like the Romans were performing on criminals in the first century. At first glance one might come to that conclusion. But in no way is this what the authors of the *Temple Scroll* had in mind. The text does not say nail him to a tree and leave him there to die. Had the scroll meant that he was nailed to the tree and then left there without food or water to die, then it would have signified the type of crucifixion that Romans were used to in the first century. But this is not what the *Temple Scroll* meant because it says right in the text itself that they shall not let *his corpse* hang on the wood, but must bury it on the same day. The *Temple Scroll* itself demands that the criminal which was hanged alive on the tree would be a corpse before sundown of the day he was tied (or nailed) to the tree of execution.

This means that every criminal who was alive and tied (or nailed) to a tree for execution was going to be a dead person (according to the *Temple Scroll*) before sundown of the day the criminal was hoisted up to the tree. But how was such a person to be killed? In the case of the two robbers who were crucified with Jesus, the Roman soldiers broke their legs which killed them. But Pilate was surprised that Jesus was already dead without his legs being broken to bring on his death. Something had already killed him. Even the *Temple Scroll* informs us how those who had committed abominable crimes were to be killed. In the very context of the *Temple Scroll* of which we are referring it said (in the previous section): “Then all the men of the city *shall stone him*, so that he die.” The only official method of execution in the Mosaic Law (which the *Temple Scroll* was trying to implement) was by stoning. Only by stoning was the blasphemer or traitor executed according to Mosaic Law. And this is the method by which the *Temple Scroll* itself shows that anyone tied (or nailed) to a tree would die before sundown of the day on which the person was hoisted to the tree.

This is clearly what the *Temple Scroll* means, and interestingly, this is the exact method by which Jesus was put to death. Professor Yadin even showed that such an interpretation was understood by the ancients. He pointed out that the Syriac translation of Deuteronomy 21:22 shows a close relationship to what the *Temple Scroll* related. Note what the Syriac states.

### ***The Hanging Took Place First and Then the Stoning***

The Syriac manuscript says: "He is hanged on a tree AND is put to death" (p.207). This plainly shows that the criminal was first hanged on the tree in order to be put to death. He was certainly not tied (or nailed) to the tree to die a lingering death some days later. The criminal was suspended on a tree in order to be put to death. And what kind of death did the person experience? It was the only one sanctioned in the Mosaic Law and also in the *Temple Scroll* for ultra-criminals. Again, the death was by stoning.

And note this point. Not only does the Syriac translation of Deuteronomy 21:22 state that the blasphemer was to be hanged on a tree AND put to death but even in the Christian portion of the *Ascension of Isaiah* the text states that Jesus was crucified on a tree (3:13; 9:15; 11:21) and in some manuscripts it shows that Jesus was killed *after* he was hanged on the tree. The text states: "he will hang him upon a tree AND kill him." This shows that Jesus was actually killed *after* having been hanged on the tree of crucifixion. The Slavic Version of the same states: "and they will hang...AND he [the executioner] will kill" (Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol.II, p.170 emphases mine). Again, these references show that Jesus was at first hanged on the tree and then, after he was hanged, he was killed. He was killed by stoning.

### ***The Temple Scroll States the Same Thing***

These early opinions agree remarkably with the *Temple Scroll* in the method of executing criminals and blasphemers at the time of Jesus. These indications also agree with the teachings of the New

Testament regarding Jesus' death when all the evidence is brought into play. The truth is, though Jesus was certainly crucified to a tree on the Mount of Olives to satisfy the Roman methods of execution, he was also *stoned* by those in Jerusalem to make his death in accordance with Mosaic Law. It was the stoning that actually caused him to die after six hours of enduring the tearing of his flesh away from many of his bones.

The early Jewish people have long known that this was the manner in which Jesus met his death. In *Sanhedrin* 43a of the Talmud we have the following account of the crucifixion of Jesus.

“On the eve of the Passover Yeshu the Nazarean [Hebrew for Jesus the Nazarean] was hanged. For forty days before the execution took place, a herald went forth and cried, ‘He is going forth TO BE STONED because he has practiced sorcery and enticed Israel to apostasy. Any one who can say anything in his favour, let him come forward and plead on his behalf.’ But since nothing was brought forward in his favour he was hanged on the eve of Passover.”

True enough, Jewish authorities knew that Jesus was *hanged*, but they also were aware that he was also *stoned* to satisfy the Law of Moses. This is what was reserved for blasphemers and those who practiced sorcery. What we find in this Jewish historical reference is the fact that they were knowledgeable that Jesus was actually *stoned* while he was *hanging* on the tree of crucifixion.

### ***The Jewish Authorities had Long Planned to Execute Jesus***

This reference in the Talmud shows that the authorities in Jerusalem had been publicly proclaiming (for a period of 40 days before the Passover in A.D.30) that Jesus deserved to be stoned for his statements and teachings. The apostles were well aware of this public pronouncement and they reminded Jesus of it. His disciples say unto him, “Master, the Jews of late thought to stone you; and go you [to Jerusalem] again?” (John 11:8). Jesus knew that the environment at Jerusalem was hostile to him and his teachings, but

he went anyway to the capital. And true enough, the public pronouncements that were being made by the authorities in Jerusalem (starting 40 days before the Passover) were indeed carried out. They were true to their word. Jesus was hanged on a living tree and then stoned in order that the commands of Moses would be fulfilled regarding a person who blasphemed against God.

There is even more Jewish evidence on this matter. Professor Jacob Z. Lauterbach in his book "Rabbinic Essays" recalls a Jewish *Baraita* (a Jewish teaching that was not codified when the first part of the Talmud was devised or that no longer appears in the Talmud) in which it says that Jesus actually met his death *by stoning* and not by crucifixion alone. In a long discourse on this subject, the *Baraita* recorded: "he [Jesus] is going out *to be stoned*" followed by "they *hanged* him" (pp.494-497). This early Jewish tradition shows that Jesus was indeed stoned to death while he was hanging on the tree. This is similar to what the *Temple Scroll* said, but in the case of the *Temple Scroll* the victim was tied (not nailed) to the tree and then he was stoned to death.

Of course, the Gospels make it clear that Jesus was truly crucified to a tree in the Roman manner. But once it is recognized that people were also throwing stones at his naked body for almost a six hour period, it can be understood why he died so quickly. The robbers who were crucified with him were not stoned as he was (because they were not judged as being blasphemers). They had to have their legs broken to kill them (as would have happened to Jesus under normal circumstances) so that their bodies would not remain on the tree after sundown to accord with the Law of Moses.

***Prophecies Showed that Jesus was to be Maimed above other Humans***

It was Jesus, however, not the robbers, that Isaiah was talking about when he said that the Suffering Servant of his prophecy would have his visage and form *more marred* than any man (Isaiah

52:14). And with a barrage of stones being thrown at the front parts of his body (after about six hours of stoning), it can easily be understood how the prophecy of Isaiah was fulfilled precisely. And this is how the apostles (some of whom were eyewitnesses to the death of Jesus on the tree of crucifixion) were able to interpret the Old Testament prophecies about Jesus' ordeal in paying for the sins of the world. This evidence shows that it was actually the *stoning* that caused Jesus' death and not his crucifixion alone.

But this doesn't end the story as far as Jesus' punishment was concerned. To complete the humiliation for such an accursed one, there was one other Old Testament example that had to be accomplished to fulfill the totality of the Old Testament legislation on the punishment of despicable criminals. We find that the tree on which the ultra-criminal was hanged had to be consumed by fire as was Achan and all his goods in the time of Joshua. Note what the scriptural example shows for individuals who had been censured as being an accursed one as was Jesus.

“And it shall be, that *he that is taken with the accursed thing SHALL BE BURNT WITH FIRE*, he and all that he has: because he has transgressed the covenant of the Lord [Yahweh], and because he has wrought folly in Israel” (Joshua 7:15).

And this is exactly what the authorities in Jerusalem were intending to do with Jesus. But, as explained in the last chapter, Joseph of Arimathea stepped in hurriedly to prevent this fate from happening to the body of Jesus. Though it is probable that the tree on which Jesus was killed (being considered accursed) was uprooted and burnt to ashes to keep the land from being contaminated, Jesus himself was spared this judicial requirement because Pilate granted Joseph of Arimathea his request to bury Jesus in his newly hewn tomb not far away from the crucifixion site.

### ***The Apostle Paul Substantiates the Stoning of Jesus***

The fact that Jesus' death was brought about by *stoning* and not

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simply by crucifixion alone is also shown by the example of what happened to the apostle Paul. The first act of persecution against the apostle Paul which the New Testament records is his enduring the punishment of *stoning* (Acts 14:19,20). This occurred to Paul while he was in the area of Galatia about the year A.D.45. Let us now notice an important fact which Paul records about himself when he wrote to the Galatian Christians about four years later. Paul said that he, at that time, *bore in his body* the marks (really, the *SCARS* ) which Jesus also had. Notice how he worded it:

“From henceforth let no man trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks [the *scars*] of the Lord Jesus” (Galatians 6:17).

Paul was saying that he had the scars of Jesus in his body and he was not speaking allegorically. Now, those *scars* were not piercings in his hands, feet and side as a result of being crucified like Jesus. No, Paul had never been crucified. But he had been *stoned* and left for dead (Acts 14:19,20). Though the type of stoning Paul endured was an illegal act, it was so severe that the people who stoned him (and then they dragged his body on the ground beyond the city limits) thought he was certainly dead. By a miracle, however, the apostle Paul got up and walked away.

And though Paul was not pelted for almost six hours, as was Jesus, he was still greatly tormented by this stoning. It resulted in many scars being on his body. And, as Jesus said, the part of the anatomy that persecutors normally injured in stoning was the face or the eyes (Mark 12:4). Is it not remarkable that the apostle Paul about four years after he was stoned told the Galatian Christians that he had at first been teaching them under great physical pain and he indicates that his principal affliction had something to do with his eyes?

“Ye know how through infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel unto you at the first. And my trial which was in my flesh ye despised not, nor rejected: but received me as an angel of God, even as Jesus. Where is then the blessedness ye spake of? for I



bear you record, that, if it had been possible, ye would *have plucked out your own eyes* and have given them to me” (Galatians 4:13-15). [Note that Paul compared his ordeal as “like Jesus.”]

Though Paul had survived his stoning in a miraculous way, he was no doubt still suffering from its consequences. Since it was common for hostile people to hurl stones at the face of a person, it can readily be understood why such a stoning could have almost blinded Paul. He wrote with large alphabetic letters (Galatians 6:11), and this may well indicate that he had difficulty in seeing clearly. The lacerations had apparently so injured Paul that there was permanent damage to his eyes and face. When he told the Galatians that my trial in my flesh ye despised not, nor rejected, it strongly implies that his wounds (even four years after his stoning) were ostensibly so bad and unattractive that the common thing for people to do would be to reject him from being in their company. The Galatians, however, did not reject him, but treated him like an angel of God, even as Jesus (because they knew that Jesus was also stoned and blinded). Since there were no plastic surgeons to improve Paul’s outward appearance, this is no doubt why Paul made a special point in telling the Galatians that he bore the *scars* of Jesus in his body (6:17). Those *scars* no doubt came from the wounds he suffered during his stoning.

This reference by Paul to his own *scars* as being the *scars* of Jesus is just another proof that Jesus himself had been subjected to stoning and not crucifixion alone. So many sharp stones had been thrown toward the front parts of his body that Jesus was made to appear like an unrecognizable bloody mass of flesh. It must have drastically altered his appearance. His visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men (Isaiah 52:14).

### ***People Should Not become Squeamish about the Crucifixion***

Now I am fully aware that most people will not like this description of Jesus’ appearance, but this is what the prophet Isaiah said

would occur and such a scene would apply precisely to someone pelted with small, sharp stones for almost a six hour period. Many people are simply not able to psychologically accept such a different appraisal of the scene of Jesus crucifixion because they have never heard such a teaching before. That's true, the description of what Isaiah said of the Suffering Servant is so unknown in most religious circles that the teaching that Jesus was an unrecognizable bloody mass of flesh can hardly be believed by many people. And interestingly, this is exactly what Isaiah said would be the reaction to the very prophecy of which we are speaking.

“Kings shall shut their mouths at him [keep silent in astonishment]: for that which HAS NOT BEEN TOLD THEM shall they see and that which THEY HAD NOT HEARD shall they consider” (Isaiah 52:15).

Even the educated leaders of the people, so Isaiah tells us, will be utterly amazed at the real teaching about the Suffering Servant. They will be astonished at the actual report of Isaiah because it had not been told them by anyone. Yet *they shall see* and *they shall consider* the report carefully. But even when the leaders here it, will they believe Isaiah's report? Isaiah asks a question of these people who have had their eyes and ears opened to the truth about the Suffering Servant. Notice his question (though in our modern translations the question is placed in the following chapter [Isaiah 53:1]).

“Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?”

Isaiah knew that most people (even the kings of the world) would *not* believe his report. He realized that people would miss the full force of what he was saying. This has happened to all of us today, and this includes me. For the first 35 years of my professional life in the fields of history and theology, I missed the impact of Isaiah's prophecy entirely. And I dare say that most of my readers have missed it too. Most of us have never heard nor have we

read *anything* that would suggest that Isaiah's Suffering Servant (whom the apostles identified with Jesus) was an unrecognizable bloody mass of flesh whose outward appearance was so altered by his ordeal that hardly anyone seeing him near the time of his death would have thought him as having a normal human form.

***The World knows Little about the Real Crucifixion of Jesus***

This description of Isaiah about the Suffering Servant is so unknown to most of us (even to Christian people) that even kings will be astonished when they understand it. Even then, however, Isaiah still asks the question: Who hath believed our report? Many people find it difficult to accept that Jesus had the front parts of his body torn to shreds in order to fulfill the prophecy of the Suffering Servant (Isaiah 52:14). But this is what happened to him if all of the evidence is considered.

The actual description of Isaiah's Suffering Servant may help us to understand other matters in the New Testament that we have wondered about. For example, when Jesus was resurrected from the dead, the New Testament states that he appeared quite differently from what he was like before. Even Mary Magdalene and the two disciples on the road to Emmaus were not able to recognize him at first. Surely the apostles understood that his flesh had been restored in a much more glorious way than before (to accord with the prophetic description in Psalm 45:2), but we are told that the scars in his hands (or wrists) and feet, and the scar from the deep sword wound that penetrated his side (where the stones could not easily reach), were allowed to remain on his glorified body as a proof of his identity (John 20:24-31) and probably as a reminder to all of what *He* accomplished for the human race.

In closing this chapter, it should be mentioned that the fact of Jesus being killed because of the effects of stoning also helps to show the area in which he was executed. We read in early Jewish writings (written within a century and a half of Jesus' death) that

there was *only ONE place* in the Jerusalem area that was designated as the place of stoning. We read: “*The Place of Stoning* was outside [far away from] the court [located in the Temple], as it is written, Bring forth him that hath cursed without the camp” (*Sanhedrin* 6:1 and also see sections 2,3 and 4). As explained in chapter five of this book, this place of execution in the time of Jesus was located near the summit of the Mount of Olives but slightly downslope towards the Temple so that the criminal could be killed in the presence of God.

### ***Others were Stoned in this Area***

There must have been an area on Olivet that encompassed Golgotha (the Place of the Poll) at which executions by stoning (as well as legal crucifixions) could take place. It is interesting that when Stephen the first Christian martyr was stoned, he first gave his witness inside the court of the Sanhedrin (Acts 6:12-15). The Sanhedrin was then located at the trading station on the Temple Mount (Cohen, *Everyman's Talmud*, p.302), and even Luke mentioned that the Sanhedrin was *in* this Holy Place which was the Temple (Acts 6:13,14). We are then told that Stephen was taken *outside the city* and the people began casting stones until he died. Where did this event take place? It was understood by early Christians to have occurred near the summit of the Mount of Olives. Wilkinson states: “The Martyrium of St. Stephen, built by Melania the Younger, and dedicated in 439, was inside the colonnade of the Imbomon...and the Martyrium on the Mount of Olives was probably the principal sanctuary of St. Stephen” (*Egeria's Travels*, p.185, note 1).

We thus find that early Christians built a Martyrium for Stephen inside the colonnade area of what we call the Imbomon today. A Martyrium was originally a place where a martyr suffered martyrdom (Smith, *Dict. of Christian Antiquities*, vol.II, p.1132). As soon as Constantine had the Church of the Holy Sepulchre built in Jerusalem, it became common for ecclesiastics to call it the

Martyrium of Jesus because they supposed that is where Jesus was martyred (*ibid.*). And so it was with Stephen. Since his execution was considered a legal one by the Sanhedrin, it would have been essential for Stephen to have been stoned at *The Place of Stoning*. And, the site of the Imbomon fits precisely.

But where is the Imbomon (the place of Stephen's Martyrium) situated? It was at the southern summit of the Mount of Olives. And importantly, we have earlier in this book identified the Imbomon area with Golgotha (the place where Jesus was also stoned and crucified). This information is just another reason why it is important to know that Jesus was *stoned* by the Jerusalem authorities (as was Stephen) and that both executions took place in the legal site for *stoning* called by the Jews the Place of Stoning.

This fact is now being acknowledged by scholars. The classical historian Enoch Powell of Britain (who became a politician and almost head of the Conservative Party in the United Kingdom) has just written a research study called "The Evolution of the Gospel" in which he claims Jesus was stoned to death. United Press reports are saying that his suggestion is causing quite a controversy in Britain. His suggestion is correct. Jesus was indeed stoned to death.

It is also important to remember that the events that happened to King David when he was ousted from his kingship (and even excommunicated from the society of Israel) at the time of Absalom's rebellion (II Samuel chapter 15 & 16). These events typified Jesus at his crucifixion. Recall that it was on the Mount of Olives where David experienced his humiliation and degradation (II Samuel 15:30,32; 16:1). This is where David composed Psalm 22 which Jesus cited as referring to himself at the time of his crucifixion (Matthew 27:46). And on this same mountain at Bahurim (located just east of the summit before descending into the Jordan Valley), a man of Benjamin began to call David accursed and tried incessantly to stone the king (II Samuel 16:5-14). This was typical of Jesus being accursed and stoned on the same Mount of Olives. It

is interesting that in New Testament times another son of Benjamin also came to hate Jesus and the early Christians so much that he lashed out at them in a similar way. That man was named Saul, who later became the apostle Paul (Acts 26:9-11). Whether there is any symbolic equation with Paul to this event that happened on Olivet to King David remains to be seen

### ***Conclusion***

The information I have given in this chapter provides a reasonable amount of evidence that Jesus met his death by *stoning* and not only by crucifixion. It also helps to show that Jesus was executed on the Mount of Olives because that is where the Place of Stoning was situated as shown by the Martyrium of Stephen. Once it is understood that Jesus died principally from *being stoned*, we can now know just how awful his crucifixion was.

This also helps us to realize in a better way why the apostles emphasized that Christians are saved through Jesus' blood. It has always been a mystery to theologians why so much emphasis is given in the New Testament to the spilling of Jesus' blood, while in normal crucifixions little blood ever reached the ground. Only a small amount of blood would ordinarily have issued from Jesus' wounds in his hands or feet while he was hanging on the tree (the blood that came forth by use of the spear would not count in a theological sense because that occurred after his death). But with the realization that Jesus was also *stoned* with small, sharp stones for almost six hours (and the front parts of his body torn to shreds), this scenario makes it easy to understand why Jesus' blood flowing copiously (as a theological symbol for the remission of sins) became an essential feature in Christian theology. Such a condition as described by Isaiah in his Suffering Servant prophecy would account for a great deal of his blood being shed for mankind at the time of his crucifixion. This is just another reason why *stoning* was a part of the crucifixion and death of Jesus atop the Mount of Olives.