



The Advocate of Truth

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Web site: www.churchofgod-7thday.org

**Del DeLong
 David DeLong
 Bond Tennant.....Editorial Staff
 Gary Mills Managing Editor
 Ludina Mills.....Children's Page Editor**

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WHY?

*Why do birds fly south each winter,
 And the leaves fall off the trees?
 They have only to return in the spring time,
 Pushed along by a gentle breeze.
 Why do the flowers all vanish
 As if some secret they know;
 Awaiting the warmth of the sunshine,
 And once again to grow?
 The leaves turn gold in the autumn,
 Covering all with a blanket of gold;
 To protect a precious seed of the flowers,
 And so all the secrets are told.
 Why does our life pass so quickly,
 And our spirit return to the sky
 To be held by God, our Creator,
 And nature can't tell us the why?
 Someday we will know of the answers,
 His plan to make everything new;
 In a world He is busy creating,
 A new home for me and for you.*

--Betty Whetstone

There is an important notice on page 20.

THOUGHTS ABOUT JESUS' BIRTH AND THE KINGDOM

Bond Tennant

Note: This is not a Christmas article.

The Church of God (7th day) does not observe Christmas! However, it is inspiring to meditate upon Jesus' birth and the kingdom all during the year.

The Prophet Isaiah wrote, "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given..." (Isaiah 9:6). Jesus was that glorious one who was hailed by the angel. We recall the words of Luke 2:10-11, "And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." The promised child was born. The foretold Son was given, and, as the promised Christ, or Messiah, He was to be the Savior of the world.

Luke 2:13-14 emphasizes the importance of the event and explains further its significance: "And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." Perhaps there is a no more familiar passage found in the Bible than this one. Throughout many years, and more so now than ever, it has seemed to be just a wish.

Many have failed to notice the assurance that "the government shall be upon his shoulder" in reading the prophecy concerning the birth of Jesus. The worldwide kingdom, which will bring peace and life, is guaranteed by divine power. It will be a blessed reality at exactly the due time foreordained by God. It will become operative by the authority vested in His Son, Christ Jesus. By contrast, the view of many has been that the world must bring about its own kingdom of peace by human efforts. Only those who view the matter as set forth in the Scriptures, and have full confidence in the promises of God, know the truth.

To make sure that we understand the truth that the kingdom government will rest upon Christ's shoulder, and not man's, the prophet adds, "...The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this" (Isaiah 9:7). "This," which will be performed by the zeal of the Lord, refers to those things that the prophet has spoken of in his preceding words. What does this prophecy say?

First, there is the promise of the child, the Son, who would be born and upon whose shoulder the government of the kingdom would rest. Jesus was that child! His birth was not by the will of man. The fulfillment of this part of the prophecy was accomplished by God's direction and power. When the angels sang of peace on earth and goodwill toward men, they meant that through this One, and through the kingdom in which He would in due time rule, God would bring peace to the nations. Also, they meant that His birth was an expression of God's goodwill toward men, not that men would suddenly, and of their own volition, begin to exercise goodwill toward one another.

Many have failed to notice the assurance that "the government shall be upon his shoulder" in reading the prophecy concerning the birth of Jesus.

The Million Dollar Question

*A Study of the Evolution of the Children of Israel
and
the Effect Temple Politics Played in the
Trial and Execution of Jesus Christ*

Marie Rasnick Fetzer

The Question

If the Jews were anxiously awaiting the Messiah, and all things pointed towards Jesus of Nazareth as being the One, WHY didn't they accept Him? WHY were the Jewish rulers so viciously determined to get rid of Him? How were they so persuasive in getting the Jewish populace and the Roman rulers to go along with their demand for His murder? Well of course the short answer is that, because of the Fall of the First Man, Adam, God enacted the Plan of Salvation (Rom 5:1-21), which required the perfect Man, Jesus Christ, to suffer and be sacrificed up in order to pay the penalty for mankind's sins. It was God's plan.....it just had to be.

But as with other difficult subjects in the Bible, it's complicated.

Israel's Rejection of God and His Prophets Results in Exile

Because of Abraham's faith, his descendants became a chosen people and enjoyed a special relationship with God. As long as they remained faithful and obeyed His commandments, God promised to protect and bless them (Deut 26:17-19). But the children of Israel broke God's covenant almost immediately. Following after the idolatry of foreign nations, they repeated a pattern of sinning, repenting and returning to the Lord, not able to sustain obedience to Him on a continuing basis. Because of their transgressions, the Lord added the Mosaic Law, an elaborate system containing Ordinances and Sacrifices which He used to teach the people obedience and to lay a foundation that would remain in effect until the Messiah should come (Gal 3:19).

Throughout the Old Testament God remained faithful even when the people did not. He sent judges, kings and priests to call His people back to Him. He used prophets to announce the coming judgment and deliverance through the Messiah and to reveal many identifying markers that would enable God's people to correctly identify Him when He appeared. In Isaiah 7:14, the Prophet spoke plainly about the nature of His conception and His name, "...the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." The prophet Micah (Micah 5:2) foretold that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, the city of King David. This prediction was so well known, that when King Herod was searching to kill the baby Jesus, he knew the chief priests and scribes would know where to find Him. Matthew 2:4-6 tell us, "And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel." Isaiah 35:5-6 tells the Messiah would perform miraculous works, such as healing the blind, the deaf, the dumb and the lame. King David, speaking through the Holy Spirit in the 22nd Psalm, foretold the type and manner of Christ's death, describing in amazing and horrifying detail the rejection, mocking, suffering and crucifixion our Lord would endure.

For hundreds of years the Jews knew all these signs that would identify their Messiah...so how could things have gone so horribly wrong? Could it really have been possible that they did not recognize their Savior and King, even while He was plainly revealed to prostitutes and sinners, and people like the Roman Centurion in Matt 8:5-13 and the Wise Men from the East in Matt 2:1-2?

The fact was, the people did not want to hear the message. For generations they rejected the prophets and got farther and farther away from God. Jeremiah 44:16-18 describes just how sinful and brazen the people had become: "As for the word that thou hast spoken unto us in the name of the LORD, we will not hearken unto thee. But we will certainly do whatsoever thing goeth forth out of our own mouth, to burn incense unto the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink-offerings unto her, as we have done, we, and our fathers, our kings,

and our princes, in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem: for then had we plenty of victuals, and were well, and saw no evil. But since we left off to burn incense to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink-offerings unto her, we have wanted all things, and have been consumed by the sword and by the famine.” Even the priesthood, for the most part, became corrupt and cursed: “And now, O ye priests, this commandment is for you. If ye will not hear, and if ye will not lay it to heart, to give glory unto my name, saith the LORD of hosts, I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings: yea, I have cursed them already, because ye do not lay it to heart. Behold, I will corrupt your seed, and spread dung upon your faces, even the dung of your solemn feasts; and one shall take you away with it” (Mal 2:1-3).

Assyria and Babylon

So finally, God had had enough. After generations of wickedness and idolatry, He removed His protection and permitted the children of Israel to be defeated militarily and taken from their homeland. Starting around 740 B.C., the northern Kingdom of Israel was carried off into captivity by the Assyrians, who were descendants of Noah’s son Ham (Gen. 10:1-11). The ancient Assyrian Empire, whose capital was Nineveh, encompassed parts of what we know today as Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Syria. A major consequence of this deportation was that after the fall of Israel, the Israelites were replaced with people from the regions of Babylon who intermarried with some of the Israelites who had been left behind. The Babylonians brought with them their worship of the pagan god Moloch and introduced the practice of human sacrifice by “passing their children through the fire”. Though they worshipped idols, they also had a fear and regard for the “God of the Land” and requested a priest be sent to them to teach them about the God of the Israelites, but the priest was not a Levite. He would have been one of Jeroboam’s false priests teaching a corrupt version of God’s laws and Holy Days (I Kings 12:25-33). The intermarriage of Gentiles and Israelites produced a cross-breed of people with a mixture of pagan worship and a polluted form of worshipping the Hebrew God of the Old Testament. Because Samaria was the capitol of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, the new hybrid people who settled the land were

called Samaritans. Over time the Jews came to bitterly despise the Samaritans because of their mixed Gentile blood and idol worship. According to John 8:48, the Jewish leaders of the New Testament hated them so much, that when the Pharisees confronted Jesus, they were so incensed that the worst insults they could hurl at Him were to call him a Samaritan and accuse him of being possessed by a devil.

Like her wicked sister Israel, the Southern Kingdom of Judah was also punished for their sins just as the prophets had warned. This happened in about 606 B.C. when King Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem and carried the people off in exile to Babylon (located about 60 miles SW of modern day Bagdad, Iraq). The rise of the Babylonian Empire, the first great world power predicted in Daniel 2:37-38, marked the beginning of a new Gentile-ruled world order and was a direct result of the Israelites’ rejection of God’s authority and government. While the people were still in captivity, another world power emerged and conquered the Babylonians. This kingdom, the Medio-Persian Empire (modern day Iran) was the second great world power predicted in Daniel 2:39.

Persia

After seventy years in Babylon, God used King Cyrus of Persia to allow His people to return home. But the people had been treated well in Babylon, and many liked life there so well that they chose to stay, or to disperse throughout major cities in the eastern Mediterranean world. The remnant that did return to resettle Judea found their homeland in shambles and no longer had a king sitting on their throne. The Holy City and Temple had been destroyed, and while they had freedom to worship as they wished, they would now be under the domination of the Persians for the next 200 years. Under the supervision of the prophet Nehemiah, they were allowed to rebuild the city walls, and with the help of Ezra the scribe, the Law of Moses and the Temple rituals were restored, and the people returned to God. But some things had changed. During the stay in Babylon, their Hebrew language had been replaced by Aramaic. And while they had gone into captivity as idolaters, those who returned had given up their idols and were committed to worshipping the one true God. The people who came out of the exile had

gone through physical and spiritual changes, but it was just the beginning of events that would have major effects on the future of Judaism and the Jewish culture.

One point to note is that, contrary to popular belief, the people of the Southern Kingdom of Judah were not the only ones to return to the Promised Land. Some think that after the Assyrian exile the tribes of the Northern Kingdom were physically “lost”, but many verses, such as Ezra 2:70 and 6:21, and Nehemiah 12:47 tell us that a remnant of the Northern Ten Tribes also returned to Israel. Even the Apostle Paul speaks of a united twelve tribes in Acts 26:7 explaining the so-called “Lost Ten Tribes of Israel” were not lost physically, but rather spiritually.

So at the close of the Old Testament, a remnant of the whole nation of Israel was back again in the Promised Land, but there was a profound and solemn consequence of the children of Israel’s refusal to heed God’s warnings --God silenced the mouths of the prophets for the next 400 years. This fulfilled the words of Psalm 74:9: “*We see not our signs: there is no more any prophet: neither is there among us any that knoweth how long.*” Because the Bible doesn’t record what happened to the children of Israel during the “silent years”, some think that God was not doing anything during that time, but that couldn’t be farther from the truth! In reality, God was very busy fulfilling prophecy and preparing the pathway for the arrival of His Son on earth and the spread of His gospel message in an awesome way!

The Silent Years

Have you ever noticed when you flip from the end of the Old Testament to the beginning of the New Testament, you are suddenly in what seems like a different world? The Pharisees and Sadducees, the Sanhedrin, Synagogues, Roman governors and the family of Herod have all emerged onto the scene. None were present in the Old Testament. Where did they come from?

Many events during this part of Israel’s history had a profound impact on the Jewish people and the world of Jesus. To understand what was happening during this time and how it fundamentally changed the Jewish people, we need to take a look back into history.

While the children of Israel were in exile, they could no longer worship or sacrifice in the Temple at Jerusalem. They were, however, allowed to gather and practice their

religion while in captivity, and in an effort to retain their cultural and religious identity, they told stories of their ancestors and read the words of the prophets. This began to shift religious activity away from Temple sacrifice in Jerusalem to community centers of learning called Synagogues. A new class of spiritual leader emerged, the Rabbi, who was both scholar and teacher in the study of the Hebrew Scriptures. Through the years, these Rabbis and other religious leaders established a series of commentaries, explanations, interpretations and additions to the Law which became known as the “Oral Tradition”. Becoming increasingly legalistic, these leaders eventually considered their traditions even more important than the Law itself and taught the people to follow the traditions of men instead of the Word of God (Matt 23:1-39). This “stumblingblock” was to become a huge problem for them in the future by blinding many Jews to the Messiah when He came.

Greece

The peaceful existence that the children of Israel enjoyed while under Persian rule (536-333 B.C.) ended when Alexander the Great of Macedon conquered Jerusalem and Israel fell to the Greeks in 331 B.C. Just twenty years old, Alexander was the military powerhouse behind the Greek Empire, the third world empire predicted by the prophet Daniel. Alexander conquered territories comprising an astonishing two million square miles. Under his rule he required Greek culture to be promoted throughout much of Europe and Asia, bringing with it their law, science, mathematics, religion, philosophy and architecture. Its spread had a huge and lasting impact, shaping world history and influencing civilization into the twenty first century, however, the clash with these “enlightened” attitudes and ideas represented a moral and spiritual crisis for the Jews.

The Greeks exalted the human body and in so doing, removed all barriers to nudity and sexual behavior. Their polytheistic religion, based on mythology, brought in magic and mystery religions that often dabbled in the occult. They denied the One True God, and in every village and town erected statues and temples to Zeus and other pagan deities. Their language, which the Israelites adopted, became the dominant language in the world. As the *lingua franca*, it served to bridge the whole world together

through communication and trade, such as our English language does today. And it holds an important part in the history of Christianity, in that the entire New Testament was written in Greek, and when Paul wrote to the Romans, who spoke Latin, he still chose to write in Greek. So to the Israelites, who were to be set apart from the Gentile nations, the arrival of the Greeks cannot be seen as a good influence. While the faithful struggled to stay separate, certain Jews succumbed to the influence of the new culture and aligned themselves with the Greek authorities. These “Hellenized” Jews were very eager to usher in Greek culture and liberalize some of the Jewish laws and tradition of the people.

Alexander the Great’s reign lasted only ten years. After his death, his huge empire was broken up and divided among his generals (Dan. 11). General Ptolemy, whose kingdom was based in Egypt, declared himself Pharaoh and began the powerful Ptolemaic Dynasty. General Seleucus ruled over Babylonia and began the rival Seleucid Dynasty based in Syria. Israel was the strategic battleground between these two warring empires, and by the time the Seleucids finally conquered Judea around 200 B.C., the Israelites had changed hands between the Ptolemies and the Seleucids five times.

In 175 B.C. a Greek named Mithradates seized the Seleucid throne making him the new ruler of the Israelites. Upon his ascension to power he assumed the name Antiochus and added to himself the title “Epiphanes”, meaning “manifest god”. This blasphemy and his ruthless actions outraged the Jews and earned him the nickname, “Epimanes,” which was a word play on the name Epiphanes and means “the Mad One”. Antiochus IV Epiphanes would unleash a reign of terror upon the Jews, becoming one of the most vicious and violent persecutors the Jews had ever known.

Antiochus wanted to expand his empire by conquering Egypt and defeating his Ptolemaic rivals. In a plan to stabilize his own territories in hopes of resisting the advancing Roman army, the new king began disrupting the influence of the Jews in Judea and Samaria by targeting their religious faith. He overthrew the High Priest, Onias, and replaced him with his brother, Jason, who had bought the office of High Priest with a bribe. Under Jason, the priesthood became lawless and corrupt.

Jason abolished the Jews’ traditional theocratic government given to them by God and, with permission

from Antiochus, converted Jerusalem into a “polis” or Greek-styled city called Antiochia, where he selected and registered the citizens himself. With this authority, he also erected a “gymnasium” at the foot of the Temple Mount. A gymnasium was a social meeting place and training facility for various forms of public games where athletes competed nude, considered by the Greeks as a way to foster appreciation for the male body and pay tribute to the gods. In an effort to fit in, certain Jews sacrificed to idols, and some went so far as to try and have their marks of circumcision removed. Further endorsing Hellenistic idolatry, Jason sent gifts to Tyre in honor of the festival of the Tyrean god Heracles. These actions and others by Jason and his supporters led to the strengthening of Hellenistic culture and weakening the traditional way of life and worship of the Jewish people. But Jason’s time as High Priest was brief. It came to an abrupt end when Menelaus, who is thought to have not even been a descendant of Aaron, offered Antiochus an even larger sum of money for the office, and was appointed High Priest in Jason’s place.

By now, the spread of Greek culture was at its peak. To force the people to accept Hellenism and renounce their Jewish faith, Antiochus sent out a decree officially forbidding the study of the Law of Moses. When the Jews refused, soldiers were sent out to enforce the decree by outlawing the observance of the Sabbath and the offering of sacrifices. Anyone in Jerusalem found practicing their religion was sentenced to death immediately. If Hebrew books were found, they were destroyed, along with the people who possessed them, and those who would circumcise their sons were burned to death. This enraged the pious Jews and the people rose up in rebellion while Antiochus was away at war, on the brink of annexing Egypt to Syria.

Unfortunately for Antiochus, the Roman army also had its sights on Egypt and warned him not to expand his kingdom in that direction. He was not powerful enough to defy the Roman Empire, and in the anger of his defeat he became even more aggressive against the Jews. He returned to Jerusalem to suppress the rebellion in 168 B.C. *“When these happenings were reported to the king, he thought that Judea was in revolt. Raging like a wild animal, he set out from Egypt and took Jerusalem by storm. He ordered his soldiers to cut down without mercy those whom they met and to slay*

those who took refuge in their houses. There was a massacre of young and old, a killing of women and children, a slaughter of virgins and infants. In the space of three days, eighty thousand were lost, forty thousand meeting a violent death, and the same number being sold into slavery” (2 Maccabees 5:11-14).

Antiochus forced his way into the Temple and set up a statue of Zeus, desecrating the Holy of Holies. He destroyed the scrolls of the Law, stole holy vessels and, to the horror of the Jews, took a sow and offered it upon the altar. With a broth made from the animal’s flesh he sprinkled everything in the temple, completely defiling and violating the sanctuary. It was this act of defiling the temple which Jesus referred to in Matthew 24:15 as the “desolating sacrilege”.

The Maccabees and the Hasmonean Dynasty

Antiochus’ desecration of the Temple and attempt to totally eliminate all traces of Jewish culture and religion resulted in continual uprisings by the people. In the year 167 B.C. Greek troops showed up in a small town about 17 miles outside Jerusalem demanding that the Jews sacrifice a pig to the Greek gods. The elder of the town, a Levite named Mattathias, refused. *“Even if all the nations that live under the rule of the king obey him, and have chosen to do his commandments, departing each one from the religion of his fathers, yet I and my sons and my brothers will live by the covenant of our fathers... We will not obey the king’s word by turning aside from our religion to the right hand or to the left” (1 Maccabees 2:19-22).* A Hellenized Jew was willing to do what Mattathias would not, and just as he was about to sacrifice the pig, Mattathias stabbed him and a Greek official standing nearby. He then turned to the crowd and cried, *“Follow me, all of you who are for God’s law and stand by the covenant” (1 Maccabees 2:27).*

Mattathias and his five sons fled to the hills and organized a guerilla army led primarily by his oldest son Judah. Outnumbered and poorly trained, these priest-warriors fought to take control of Judea. In recognition of Judah’s ferocity in battle, he took the descriptive name “Maccabee” meaning “hammer”, which was applied to the other members of his family. This revolt of the Jews

set a precedent in human history – it was the first religious war. No one in the ancient world died for their gods, only the Jews thought their religion was worth dying for. But the rebellion was not just a war against the Greeks, it also took on an element of civil war between the orthodox Jews and the Hellenized Jews who were loyal to the Greeks.

After three years the Maccabees were able to reconquer Jerusalem. When they reentered the Temple the first thing they tried to do was to light a makeshift menorah, because the real gold one had been melted down by the Greeks. Only one vial of pure lamp oil with the priests’ special seal was discovered, which they used to light the menorah. Miraculously, it stayed lit for eight days, by which time fresh oil had been pressed and delivered to the Temple. The Temple was purified and rededicated, and on the 25th day of the ninth month Kislev, the priests rose up and offered sacrifices on the new altar. The people celebrated with songs and musical instruments with a festival lasting for eight days. This celebration, known today as Hanukkah, not only celebrated the military victory of the vastly outnumbered Jews against the Greeks, it also celebrated the spiritual victory of Jewish values over those of the Greeks.

The battles continued as the Greek army remained in Jerusalem and continued to try to retake the city. Mattathias’ son Simon, now the High Priest, took upon himself the name of “nasi” which means prince or leader. He knew that a Jewish king could only come from the tribe of Judah through David, and even though he did not call himself “king”, for all practical purposes he assumed the role of king. This was a bad choice on his part because his descendants did not respect this distinction. They started a new ruling dynasty in Israel called the Hasmonean Dynasty, which lasted for 103 years. Corrupted by their own power, their rule was marked by a great territorial expansion and a terrible moral and religious decline.

Under the rule of Simon’s son, John Hyrcanus, Israel increased its borders and the newly conquered people were forcibly converted to Judaism. This error in policy eventually cost the Jews dearly, because one of the peoples forcibly converted were the Idumeans, and one of their descendants, Herod, would later be appointed Jewish King when the Romans invaded.

The fighting continued for 25 years with a great many casualties on both sides before the Seleucid Greeks finally

reached a peace agreement with the Jews. It was not until 142 B.C. that a peace treaty was signed with Simon, the last survivor of the five sons of Mattathias. The fact that the people were once again able to rule themselves gave them a renewed hope, however some were bitterly disappointed by the Maccabees' style of control. Subsequent rulers became largely Hellenized and began siding with a splinter group called the Sadducees. Early supporters of the Maccabees, who by now had turned against them, they were more aligned with the Pharisees. Subsequent leaders became more and more Hellenized, and by the time of the last two Hasmonean leaders, brothers named Hyrcanus and Aristobulus, they were power hungry and corrupt and fighting with each other as to who should be "king".

Rome

In 63 B.C., as the power of the Grecian Empire weakened, General Pompeus blazed onto the scene, and with a terrible slaughter, overthrew Jerusalem and captured the city. From that time on the Jews were under the control and authority of the fourth great world power, the Roman Empire. Pompey established Hyrcanus as Ethnarch (governor) and High Priest; later, Julius Caesar appointed Antipater as the first Roman Procurator, or financial administrator. Antipater was a crafty and skilled counselor, well connected and useful to both the Jews and the Romans. He was an Idumean, that is, an Edomite, whose father had been forcefully converted to Judaism under Hasmonean rule. He was also half Arab. Antipater laid the foundation for his family's success by appointing his son Herod (the Great) as governor of Galilee and his son Phasael as governor of Jerusalem, laying the foundation for the Herodian Dynasty.

Antipater's son Herod impressed the Senate with his abilities and loyalty to Rome, and in 40 B.C. they declared him "King of the Jews"; by 37 B.C. he was thoroughly in military control of Judea. Even though both Antipater and Herod the Great were technically Jewish, they were resented by the observant and nationalist Jews for their non-Jewish and Arab ancestry, their Hellenized culture, and their collusion with the Romans. The Hasmoneans challenged his authority and finally a political pact was arranged in which Herod would divorce his wife Doris and marry the granddaughter of Hyrcanus, a Hasmonean

princess named Mariamne. This put an end to their opposition to his rule and an end to the Hasmonean Dynasty itself.

Herod the Great ruled for 37 years and did much to improve his kingdom during that time, at least on the material level. He was obsessed with massive and elaborate construction projects including the building of Caesarea and the fortresses at Masada and Herodium, but the Judeans were heavily taxed to pay for them. The Jewish Temple had been destroyed and rebuilt half a dozen times since the end of the Old Testament, and in 20 B.C. Herod began re-building it again "on a more magnificent scale" to represent a "capital city more worthy of his dignity", and also to gain more support from the Jews. It took 10,000 men ten years just to build the retaining walls around the Temple Mount, and a part of that wall, known as "the Wailing Wall", still stands today. Herod was a ruthless and paranoid king who did not hesitate to kill anyone who threatened his authority, even his own family members. He made enemies of the Sadducees as he interfered in the hierarchy of the priesthood and appointed the office to whomever he wished, and he made enemies of the Pharisees when he had many students of the Torah burned alive when they smashed down a golden Roman eagle he had placed at the entrance of the Temple. Near the end of his life, Herod the Great was suffering from a debilitating disease and was mentally unstable. He was still ruling Judea at the time of Jesus' birth, and it was he who, upon hearing the news, ordered the slaughter of all male babies around the vicinity of Bethlehem to avoid the loss of his throne to the newborn King of the Jews.

When Herod died shortly after Christ's birth, in about 4 A.D., his kingdom was divided into four parts. The region of Galilee where Jesus grew up and spent most of his public ministry was given to his son, Herod Antipas, who was also called Herod the Tetrarch and "King" Herod (although he was never king). Antipas had put away his first wife to marry his sister-in-law, Herodias, and it was because of John the Baptist's condemnation of this arrangement that Antipas had him arrested. Antipas subsequently had John beheaded as a result of Herodias' influence. When Jesus was brought before Pontius Pilate during His trial, Pilate sent Him to Antipas because he was the ruler of the region where Jesus had been most active during His ministry. So Antipas was involved in events leading up to the executions of both John the Baptist

and Jesus of Nazareth.

Coming Out of the Darkness

So as the Jewish community re-emerged at the close of the Silent Years, it is clear that God had used the previous four hundred years to reshape world order which resulted in a fundamental change in the children of Israel. The Israelites of Judea were now a mixture of Greek, Roman and Hebrew cultures, and over the past several centuries their religious leaders had become corrupted and fractured. The people had been conquered, oppressed and polluted, and were now back under foreign rule, but this time there was a king on the throne. But the king was not a descendant of King David. This king was a descendant of Esau, and his name was Herod the Great. Furthermore, the high priests were appointed and removed from office by the command of the Roman governors. Spirits were low and their only hope seemed to be in the coming of the Messiah. But the people were looking for Him to restore their nation to its former wealth and prestige, and most of the Jews could not even consider the concept of a humble Messiah, and when He came, they would not recognize Him.

A Prophet Speaks

The Silent Years ended with the appearance of an itinerant Hebrew preacher and Prophet, John the Baptist, whose purpose was to identify and bear witness of the Messiah and the coming Kingdom of God. John came wandering the desert wearing clothes made of camel's hair and eating locusts and wild honey, spreading a radical new message that called for the confession of sins and baptism by immersion in the waters of the Jordan River. He had a powerful appeal and the people flocked to see him. The Jews, who were watching every religious movement of the day with suspicion, sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "who art thou?" and he confessed that he was not the Christ. They asked "are you Elias? are you that prophet?" and he answered "no". Then they said unto him, "who art thou?" and he said, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias" (John 1:19-23).

John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth were cousins. Jesus was believed to be a carpenter's son who grew up in the hill country of Galilee north of Judea, but in truth, He was the Son of God (Matt 3:17), the Christ (or Messiah) that the world had been waiting for since the time of Creation (Matt 1:1; Gen 3:15). As Jesus prepared to begin His public ministry, He went to John to be baptized, and John recognized Him and bore witness of Him. "The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me. And I knew him not: but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water. And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God" (John 1:29-34).

The coming of Jesus, along with His death and resurrection, fulfilled countless Old Testaments prophecies (Matt 5:17): Jesus was the Son of God (Matt 17:5), the Messiah (John 4:25-26; Mark 14:61-62), and the Lamb of God (John 1:29). God the Father bore witness of Him (Matt 17:5), Jesus bore witness of Himself (John 8:18), the miracles that Jesus performed bore witness of Him (John 10:24-25), demons knew who He was (Mark 1:23-24), and common people recognized Him (John 4:42).

Jesus spent much of His ministry in Galilee gathering disciples, preparing the people for the Kingdom of God, preaching in parables and casting out demons. He healed countless people of physical illnesses and conditions so that, according to Matt 9:4-5, they would know that He had the power to forgive their sins. At Capernaum, the people were "astonished at His teaching; for His word was with authority", and His reputation began to spread throughout Galilee.

New Religious Order

Fifteen hundred years earlier, God had given Moses and Aaron specific instructions in the Sinai desert about the establishment of His Godly System, but by the time

that Jesus and John walked the earth, Jewish religious structure had radically changed. During the span of the Greek and Roman occupations political and religious differences had divided the people into several brotherhoods, or sects, who were at odds with each other and vying for control. The Hellenists, who were the Greek lovers, formed the party known as the Sadducees, and under the Sadducees, Jewish leadership changed from the God ordained priesthood to the Sadducee-controlled Sanhedrin which managed to stay in power since the time of the Greeks. They were of the wealthy upper class and were the party from which the High Priests came. They connected themselves to Rome because they wanted to stay in power, and worked hard to keep the peace by agreeing with the decisions of the local authorities. The Sadducees rejected all of the Old Testament except for the first five Books of Moses. While they sought to preserve the authority of the written Word of God, they definitely were not perfect in their doctrinal views and held certain beliefs that actually contradict Scripture. They denied the resurrection of the dead or any afterlife (Matt 22:23; Mark 12:18-27; Acts 23:8) and they denied the existence of angels and demons (Acts 23:8). In the New Testament they came again and again to the Lord with questions about the supernatural, like *“What will happen to a woman who has been married to seven different men? In the resurrection, whose wife will she be?”* (Matt 22:23-33). They did not believe in a resurrection, but were trying to trap Jesus with these questions.

The Hebrew nationalists who wanted to preserve everything according to the Mosaic Law became known as the Pharisees, meaning “the separated ones” (as in by a superior piety from the common people). They were experts in the Law who gave the oral tradition of men equal authority to the written Word of God. While the Sadducees were connected to the Temple, the Pharisees were connected to the Synagogues and became the local teachers. Although they were in the minority in the Sanhedrin, they were more popular with the common people. The Pharisees viewed themselves religiously superior to everyone else and grew stronger and more legalistic in their requirements until they became religious hypocrites, keeping the outward form of the law but completely violating the spirit.

Several other smaller sects formed, such as the Scribes, who were most involved in the preservation of the Hebrew

Scripture and were associated with the Pharisees. The Herodians, who tended to be wealthy Jews, connected very closely to the Roman ruling family, the Herods. The Essenes were a group that removed themselves away from society to the area down near the Dead Sea and became separatists. And there were the Publicans who were the tax collectors, and the Zealots who would do anything, including violence, to overthrow Roman rule.

Sanhedrin and High Priests

The Sanhedrin was the 70 member Sadducee-controlled Jewish governing body, and the High Priest was its president. Originally High Priests descended through the priestly line of Aaron and served for life, but now they were appointed by the Roman authorities and served as liaisons between the Romans and the Jews by keeping the Jewish populace in line. In 6 A.D. the Romans had appointed a man named Ananias, or Annas, as High Priest but they deposed him ten years later. While having been officially removed from office, he was still referred to as “High Priest” and continued to be extremely influential politically and socially in matters of the Jews, aided by his five sons (who were subsequent High Priests) and his son-in-law, Caiaphas (also a High Priest). It was Annas, rather than Caiaphas who Jesus was first taken to after His arrest. Caiaphas was the son-in-law of Annas. Luke 3:2 describes these two as holding sort of a joint High Priesthood during the time of John the Baptist, but Caiaphas was the “official” High Priest during the trial of Jesus. It was Caiaphas who declared Jesus guilty of blasphemy and it was Caiaphas who, unknowingly, made the incredible prophecy concerning the necessity of the death of Jesus for the whole Jewish nation (John 11:49-50). Annas and Caiaphas continued to persecute followers of Jesus even after His death, and were present at the meeting of the Sanhedrin in which the Apostles Peter and John were brought in to defend themselves for preaching the Gospel of Resurrection and to answer on whose authority they had healed a crippled man (Acts 4:6-7).

As Jesus expanded His ministry into the area around Jerusalem where He continued to teach the people and perform mighty miracles, His popularity increased with the crowds. So did the opposition from the Jewish leaders, and they began to watch Him. Conflict arose when He

called out the Pharisees for their hypocrisy and angered the High Priests and Elders by threatening their religious system and way of life. Because they had been more concerned with politics, they had been unconcerned with Jesus until they became afraid He might bring unwanted Roman attention that could take away their power. The Jewish leaders questioned Him as to what authority He did His works and became furious at His claim to be from God, because it meant His authority was greater than theirs, and they would not accept that.

Ripening Conditions and Conspiracy

As Jesus continued His Father's work out in the open, tensions rose with each statement He made that cut the Jewish leaders to the core. He claimed to be the Light of the World (John 8:12) and the Good Shepherd (John 10:11) and the Door through which a man must enter to be saved (John 10:9). He said that He had the power from His Father to lay down His life and take it up again (John 10:18) and to give His Sheep eternal life (John 10:27-28). Because of these sayings the Jews were divided and many of them said He had a devil and was mad. When Jesus walked into the Temple onto Solomon's porch, *"Then came the Jews round about him, and said unto him, How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly. Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye believed not: the works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me. But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one."* (John 10:23-30). This so outraged the Jews that they took up stones to stone Him for blasphemy because He made Himself equal to God. They sought to apprehend Him, but He escaped out of their hands and went to a place beyond the Jordan.

While Jesus was gone, He received word from two of his followers, Mary and Martha, that their brother Lazarus was sick. After a short delay He and His Disciples returned to Judea, even though the Jews still sought to kill Him. When they arrived in Bethany they found Lazarus had

already been dead for four days. The sisters took Him to their brother's grave and rolled away the stone, and Jesus, in a loud voice, prayed to His Father and commanded Lazarus to come forth, and *"he that was dead came forth"* (John 11:1-43). Many of the Jews who had come to comfort Mary and Martha were witnesses to the resurrection of Lazarus. Some responded by placing their faith in Jesus, while others went back to the Pharisees and reported the miracle that He had done. The Chief Priests and the Sadducees, who did not believe in the resurrection, felt threatened and responded to the report of the raising of Lazarus with hostility and rage. Caiaphas, the High Priest, called a meeting of the Sanhedrin and organized a plot to kill Jesus. *"Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a council, and said, What do we? for this man doeth many miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him: and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation. And one of them, named Caiaphas, being the high priest that same year, said unto them, Ye know nothing at all, Nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not. And this spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation; And not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad. Then from that day forth they took counsel together for to put him to death"* (John 11:47-53). They not only consulted together against Jesus, but discussed how they might put Lazarus to death, too (John 12:10-11).

Six days before the Passover Jesus was in Bethany, just outside Jerusalem, in the house of Simon the Leper, where a supper had been made for Him. His friend Martha served while her brother Lazarus, whom Jesus had raised from the dead, reclined at the table with the Lord. During the meal, their sister Mary approached the Lord with an alabaster flask of a very costly ointment and anointed Him in symbolic preparation for His burial which would be just a few days later (John 12:1-8).

By now, the city was filled with thousands of pilgrims for the feast who wondered if Jesus would show up for the Passover. When they heard that He was coming to Jerusalem, excitement increased among the multitude as they all wanted to catch a glimpse of the Prophet from Galilee who had done such a mighty miracle as raise a

man from the dead. As Jesus drew near, His Disciples placed their garments upon a colt and set Him upon it. As they approached Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives a crowd joined them, casting their garments along the way, rejoicing and praising with a loud voice of all the mighty works that they had seen (Luke 19:29-37). When they called out “Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord!” it was too much for some of the Pharisees who were in the crowd, and they called to Him, “*Master, rebuke thy disciples*” (Luke 19:38-39).

Jesus entered the city, humbly riding on a donkey’s colt, and the people who were inside the city went forth to meet Him. They laid cut branches and their garments in the road before Him, crying out “...*Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord*” (John 12:13). This event, which fulfilled the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9, is called our Lord’s Triumphant Entry, but in just a few days some in the crowd that praised Him with their “hosannas” would turn into an angry mob slinging shouts of “Crucify Him!” to the Chief Priests, demanding He be put to death. Although they proclaimed Him their King, and had heard His words and seen His miracles, in the end, they were disappointed because He did not restore Israel in the way or time that they expected. He was not the King that they wanted.

As Jesus neared the Temple He became enraged that merchants had turned His Father’s House into a “den of thieves”. He made a whip of cords and chased out dove sellers and overturned the tables of the moneychangers inside (John 2:13-16; Luke 19:46). Afterwards, the Chief Priests and Scribes watched as He healed the blind and lame, and became indignant when they heard the children crying out in the Temple, “Hosanna to the Son of David”.

In the days leading up to His death, Jesus continued to teach the people and to perform miracles. He gave signs and sermons about the Kingdom to come while the Chief Priests and Elders watched His every move. The Sadducees tried to trap Him with their questions about the resurrection. The Pharisees tried to trap Him with their questions about paying tribute to Caesar. Jesus charged them with scathing words and pronounced upon them “woes”, calling them “hypocrites” and “serpents and vipers”. He told a parable which they understood as a condemnation against themselves, and plainly told them that the Kingdom would be taken from them and given to another nation, the Gentiles (Mark 12:13-27; Matt. 23:1-39; Matt. 21:33-46).

The acclaim that the people gave Jesus as He

triumphantly entered Jerusalem and the incident at the Temple served to ignite a powder keg of emotions among the religious rulers of the Jews. Their anger escalated into an intense and murderous fury and they couldn’t wait any longer. The Sanhedrin plotted to destroy Him. They formally decreed the death of Jesus and issued order for His arrest. They wanted to do it quickly, before the Passover, and were searching for someone to betray Him, someone close to Jesus, and found him in His Disciples called Judas. “*Now the Festival of Unleavened Bread, called the Passover, was approaching, and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were looking for some way to get rid of Jesus, for they were afraid of the people. Then Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot, one of the Twelve. And Judas went to the chief priests and the officers of the temple guard and discussed with them how he might betray Jesus. They were delighted and agreed to give him money. He consented, and watched for an opportunity to hand Jesus over to them when no crowd was present.*” (Luke 22:1-6).

The Problem with the Passover

On the night before Jesus died, He told His Disciples to prepare the Passover meal a full 24 hours before the Passover of the Jews. Did He observe the Passover on the wrong night? Or did He properly follow God’s instructions regarding the killing and eating of the Passover meal? In the 12th chapter of the Book of Exodus God gave Moses very specific regulations on the timing and preparation of the Passover (Exodus 12:1-13). The people were to observe this day throughout their generations as a permanent statute on the 14th day of the first month Nisan. They were to take an unblemished male lamb of the first year, of the sheep or of the goats, and kill it at evening and eat it on the same night. The Bible gives many examples of the Jews correctly celebrating the Passover for hundreds of years during Old Testament times, such as during the second year after the children of Israel had come out of Egypt (Numbers 9:1-14); in the Plains of Jericho (Joshua 5:10); and by the Exiles who had returned from the captivity shortly before the beginning of the “Silent Years”, (Ezra 6:19-22). So in Luke 22:15 when Jesus told His Disciples, “... *With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer*”, we may be sure that He celebrated the Passover at the correct time, after sunset on the beginning of the 14th of Nisan, according to His Father’s will.

Despite clear biblical evidence of the proper day for this observance, many people during Jesus' time observed Passover on the 15th of Nisan. Somewhere along the way the Sanhedrin allowed themselves the authority to calculate astronomical projections and mathematical equations to create a fixed calendar that all Israel could use to keep the months and festival season synchronized without relying on observation of the moon. This deviates from God's command of visual observation of the moon. While the Jews still use such a calendar today, one source admits, *"The fixed calendar is not a perfect system, and occasionally discrepancies arise between the Jewish calendric date and the actual phase of the moon... Some argue for a stricter and more consistent correlation between the phase of the moon and the date of the month than the Jewish version of the biblical calendar offers. They advocate an alternative reckoning of the calendar on the basis that they perceive their interpretation to be more biblically correct... No Rabbi, leader, or group of leaders has the authority to alter what has been set in place by the lawful and recognized authorities over Israel. It needs to suffice until a singular authority over all Israel arises that can correct it..."*, (*"Is the Jewish Calendar Wrong?"* by D. Thomas Lancaster, *First Fruits of Zion*). It seems that "singular authority" over Israel, Jesus Christ, has already arisen, and did in fact correct it almost two thousand years ago by celebrating the Passover on the biblically correct day as God instructed.

Additional confusion occurs by the combining of Passover with The Feast of Unleavened Bread. The Bible tells us clearly these are two separate events. Passover is only one day and it commemorates when God struck and killed all the first born of Egypt, but spared, or "passed over" the homes of the Hebrews. The Feast of Unleavened Bread is just that, a feast, lasting seven days, and celebrates the children of Israel's deliverance from slavery (Exodus 13:3-10 and Leviticus 23:6). But because both are closely connected, and both involve the eating of unleavened bread, they are commonly considered one festival or feast and their names are used interchangeably.

Jesus, the True and Better Passover Lamb

Jewish historian Flavius Josephus was a Pharisee and

priest, and an eye-witness to first century Temple practices. He records that the Jews killed the Passover sacrifice between the ninth hour and the eleventh, ("Antiquities of the Jews" Book 3, Chapter 10, Paragraph 5), that is, between three and five o'clock on the afternoon, towards the *end* of the 14th of Nisan. The Passover meal was then eaten sometime *after* sunset, which was the beginning of the 15th. This explains John 18:28, *"Then led they Jesus from Caiaphas unto the hall of judgment: and it was early; and they themselves went not into the judgment hall, lest they should be defiled; but that they might eat the passover."* The Jews had to remain ritually pure to partake of the Passover, which they had not yet eaten, so they did not enter into the Roman governor's "judgment hall" because it would have rendered them unclean and prevented them from eating the Passover.

The Gospel of Matthew tells us that Jesus was on the stake from the sixth hour to the ninth, and that He "yielded up the ghost" on the ninth hour (Matt 27:45-50). So this means that, while the priests were slaying the sacrificial lambs in the Temple for the Jews' observance of the Passover, Jesus, the Lamb of God, was being killed on the tree at the same time. While this change of Passover date clearly does not follow the guidelines given to Moses, it does show beautifully how God used this conflict regarding the misinterpretation of the Scripture to provide a means by which His Son could keep the proper observance as given to Moses while introducing perfectly the New Covenant, as well as fulfill Jesus as a type of the Passover Lamb slain for the sins of the people.

Institution of the Lord's Supper

During Jesus' Last Passover, He washed the Disciples' feet and told them that they must follow His example, or else they would have no part in Him. After Judas, one of the twelve, was identified as the one who would betray Him, he immediately got up and left to go meet with members of the Sanhedrin to make final preparations for Christ's betrayal (John 13:1-30). Jesus then used this opportunity to introduce the emblems of unleavened bread and grape juice to represent His body and blood that would be shed for many for the forgiveness of sins. He instructed his followers to keep this new institution, called the Lord's Supper, annually, as a memorial of His death,

until He would eat it again with them in the Kingdom of God. After they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives and into the garden called Gethsemane so that Jesus could pray and prepare Himself and His Apostles for His torture and death which would soon take place (Luke 22:14-20; Matt. 26:26-56).

Arrest and Trial of Jesus Christ

While He was still speaking to His Disciples, Judas appeared with a band of men and officers from the Chief Priests and Pharisees, coming forth with lanterns and torches and weapons (John 18:2-3). He called out, "Master, Master" and betrayed Him with a kiss, which identified who the crowd should apprehend, so they took Jesus and bound Him and led Him away.

The Sanhedrin wanted a covert arrest at night because they feared the reaction of the people. They used deceit and treachery in order to orchestrate His apprehension, and afterwards immediately began violating their own rules. Nighttime and private interrogations were illegal and cases involving capital punishment must not be begun on the eve of Sabbath or of a legal holiday or feast under court rules (Mishnah Tractate Sanhedrin 4.1). The indictment should have waited until the next day and taken place before the entire Sanhedrin. Instead, they arrested Him in the middle of the night and led Him first to Annas. After a brief questioning, they took Him to the home of the High Priest, Caiaphas, where the Scribes and the Elders were assembled for a secret night trial. Their agenda was prearranged. They sought false witness against Jesus, to put Him to death, but they found none, so Caiaphas intensified his interrogation. He said to Jesus, "*I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven. Then the high priest rent his clothes, saying, He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses? behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy. What think ye? They answered and said, He is guilty of death. Then did they spit in his face, and buffeted him; and others smote him with the palms of their hands, Saying, Prophecy unto us, thou Christ, Who is he that smote thee?*" (Matt 26:59-68). And so Jesus was

condemned of blasphemy by the majority of the Sanhedrin (although Joseph of Arimathea dissented), and was sentenced to death.

All the Chief Priests and Elders of the people took counsel against Him to put Him to death; and as soon as it became light, they bound Him, led Him away, and delivered Him to Pontius Pilate the Roman governor. They remained outside the Praetorium, or Hall of Judgment, speaking with Pilate only when he came out to meet with them on the balcony, because by going in they would have defiled themselves and become disqualified from eating the Passover later that night, (John 18:28). Because it was the custom of the Romans to leave as much power as possible to control religious crimes in the hands of the Jewish authorities, Pilate asked them what accusations they brought against this Man, then said, "*...Take ye him, and judge him according to your law*" (John 18:31 first part), but, "*The Jews therefore said unto him, It is not lawful for us to put any man to death,*" (John 18:31 last part). Knowing it was unlikely the Romans would issue a death penalty for what they considered a religious matter, the Sanhedrin cunningly twisted the accusation from blasphemy to treason against the Roman Empire by accusing Jesus of proclaiming Himself a Jewish King and Messiah. After questioning Jesus, Pilate returned to the people and publicly declared, "*...I find in him no fault at all*" (John 18:38). "*And they were the more fierce, saying, He stirreth up the people, teaching throughout all Jewry, beginning from Galilee to this place. When Pilate heard of Galilee, he asked whether the man were a Galilaean. And as soon as he knew that he belonged unto Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who himself also was at Jerusalem at that time*" (Luke 23:5-7).

So Pilate seized the opportunity to get rid of his Jewish "problem" by passing Jesus and His accusers off to the next authority, Herod the Tetrarch, the ruler of Galilee. Herod was also known as Herod Antipas, or King Herod, although he never bore the title of king, but it was this Herod that had beheaded Jesus' cousin, John the Baptist a few years earlier. When Herod saw Jesus, he was "exceeding glad" because for a long time he had heard many things about Him and hoped that He would do some miracle for him. He questioned Jesus "in many words"; but "He answered him nothing". The Chief Priests and Scribes stood and vehemently accused Jesus, but He

remained silent. When Herod grew tired of Him, he, with his “men of war”, belittled Him and mocked Him and arrayed Him with a gorgeous robe, before sending Him back to Pilate again. The Bible notes that, that “...*same day Pilate and Herod were made friends together; for before they were at enmity between themselves*” (Luke 23:8-12).

The trial continued as Jesus returned to the Praetorium with the accusing mob following behind. Since Pilate had initially found Jesus innocent, he wanted to get it over with and let Him go. He called the Chief Priests and rulers and the people together and said unto them, “...*Ye have brought this man unto me, as one that perverteth the people: and, behold, I, having examined him before you, have found no fault in this man touching those things whereof ye accuse him: No, nor yet Herod: for I sent you to him; and, lo, nothing worthy of death is done unto him. I will therefore chastise him, and release him... And they cried out all at once, saying, Away with this man, and release unto us Barabbas... Pilate, therefore, willing to release Jesus, spake again to them. But they cried, saying, Crucify him, crucify him. And he said unto them the third time, Why, what evil hath he done? I have found no cause of death in him: I will therefore chastise him, and let him go*” (Luke 23:13-16, 18, 20-22). But the crowd, incited by the Sanhedrin, cried out, “...*If you release him you are not a friend of Caesar. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar*” (John 19:12). “*When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it. Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children*” (Matt 27:24-25). “*And Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they required*”... and “*delivered Jesus to their will*” (Luke 23:13-25).

Then Pilate’s soldiers took Jesus into the common hall and stripped Him and put on Him a scarlet robe. They plaited a crown of thorns and put it on His head and a reed in His right hand and kneeled before Him, mocking Him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews. And they spit on Him and smote Him on the head and afterwards put back on Him His own raiment and led Him away to crucify Him (Matthew 27:27-31).

In this way the Jewish leaders intimidated Pilate until he relented and handed Jesus over to be crucified (John 19:16). Their role in His execution is confirmed by Jewish historian Flavius Josephus, who wrote these chilling words, “*Pilate sentenced him to die on the cross, having been urged to do so by the noblest of our citizens*”, (Antiquities of the Jews, Book 18, Chapter 3.3).

Even though the Sanhedrin claimed that the death penalty was not available to them under Roman law, there is strong reason to believe that they could have executed Jesus if they had wanted to. The New Testament records incidents of execution, or attempted execution, of stoning by the Jews, as in the death of the Disciple Stephen, the first Christian martyr, (Acts 7:58-60). Other sources outside the Bible corroborate similar accounts. Josephus records that the High Priest Ananus ben Ananus, “*assembled the Sanhedrin of judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others; and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned*”, (“Antiquities of the Jews”, Book 20, Chapter 9, Paragraph 1). Clement of Alexandria wrote that “*James was thrown from a pinnacle of the Temple, and was beaten to death with a club*”, and Hegesippus, whose original works are now lost, wrote “*the Scribes and Pharisees placed James upon the pinnacle of the Temple, and threw down the just man, and they began to stone him, for he was not killed by the fall. And one of them, who was a fuller, took the club with which he beat out clothes and struck the just man on the head*”. Additionally, the Jews had actually attempted to kill Jesus prior to His execution on more than one occasion: “*Then took they up stones to cast at him: but Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by*” (John 8:59; 10:30-31).

Furthermore, archeologists have uncovered what are essentially two “Do Not Enter” stone tablets from the Temple with inscriptions written in Greek warning of death to non-Jews who passed into certain restricted areas. One of these tablets is housed in Jerusalem at the Israel Museum, and the other is in the Archaeology Museum in Istanbul, Turkey. Josephus described these signs in detail, which read: “*No foreigner may enter within the*

balustrade around the sanctuary and the enclosure. Whoever is caught, on himself shall he put blame for the death which will ensue.”

Another Jewish source, the Mishnah, makes clear that execution by stoning was an available option for the crime of blasphemy, (Mishnah Tractate Sanhedrin 7.4). The Mishnah is a complex written work, the primary record of Jewish legal theory and oral tradition that was compiled by a Rabbi named Judah after the destruction of the Temple, so that “the learning did not vanish”. Although it was officially compiled about 170 years after Jesus’ murder, Biblical accounts of stoning for blasphemy and adultery would indicate that these laws were in effect during New Testament times and would have been an option to the Sanhedrin if they so chose.

The Execution

The Sadducees and the Pharisees hated each other, but they found a common enemy in Jesus.

Because of envy (Mark 15:10), the Jewish leaders conspired to put Jesus of Nazareth to death. Not willing to do it themselves, they intimidated the Romans into doing it. After Jesus was subjected to an illegal trial, mocked, humiliated and scourged, Pontius Pilate gave in to the will of the people and turned Him over to be killed. Pilate was convinced that Jesus was innocent, so he sought to deflect his guilt by simply washing his hands of His murder. Roman soldiers led Him outside the city to a place called Golgotha in a public execution for all to see. The details are grizzly. By nine o’clock in the morning (the third hour), His hands and feet had been nailed to a stake. He was tortured and humiliated and was hung on a tree between two thieves and endured an agonizing death in order to bring salvation to those who had rejected Him, and to the entire world.

Even though the Jewish leaders rejected Jesus’ message and refused to recognize Him as their Messiah, Creation itself bore witness that this Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. Matthew 27:45-54 tells of the occurrence of many supernatural events surrounding His death and resurrection, such as a period of three hours of “darkness over all the land” during the time Jesus was dying on the stake. And after He “yielded up the ghost”, Matthew writes, “*And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did*

quake, and the rocks rent; And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, And came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many.”

Jesus and His Father’s message had been foretold by the prophets of old and had been declared onto the nations before Jews and Gentiles, rulers and politicians, and the common people alike. Pilate bore witness to the whole world by placing a plaque over His head proclaiming “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews”, which was written in three languages, Hebrew, Greek and Latin. And as the centurion who was watching Jesus, and those who were with him, saw these things, they were convinced that Jesus was who He said He was, and they feared greatly, and bore one final witness, saying, “*Truly this was the Son of God*” (Matt 27:54).

Summary and Aftermath

There were many reasons why the Jewish leaders did not recognize Jesus as their Messiah and why they wanted Him dead. They felt He was a lawbreaker who had shown disregard for the Sabbath and other legal and ceremonial requirements. They were full of hypocrisy, pride and arrogance and were offended that Jesus socialized with sinners, and feared His growing popularity with the people would somehow threaten their religious system and way of life. They feared His authority and felt their power slipping from their hands. They didn’t see themselves as sinners before God or in need of a spiritual savior because their hearts had been hardened, and they didn’t like His message because it confronted their pride.

As a result, the Jewish High Court plotted to have Jesus arrested. They charged Him with being a false king, a false prophet and a false Messiah. They ultimately charged Him with blasphemy because He alluded to God as His Father. They subjected Him to an illegal trial, incited the Jewish people against Him and intimidated the Romans into murdering Him. So the Jewish leaders condemned Jesus to death, and the Romans carried out the death sentence. He was executed in Jerusalem on the 14th of Nisan around the year 33 A.D., but what they meant for evil, God meant for good.

After Jesus died, His bruised and bloody body was taken down off the tree and laid in a tomb. After three

days and three nights God raised Him from the dead. Jesus had completed His work on earth, the Plan of Salvation, which God had promised before the world began (Titus 1:2; 2 Timothy 1:9). Through His death on the tree, our sins were canceled out and mankind once again has access to God, through Christ our Lord. His blood has cleansed us, and the ancient separation from God's presence has been canceled, and through His resurrection we are given the chance of eternal life (Heb. 5:1-10; Heb. 7:11-28).

The death of Jesus of Nazareth resulted in the end of the Aaronic Priesthood when the High Priest offered up the Perfect Sacrifice that would end all sacrifices, and replaced it with Christ's eternal priesthood according to the order of Melchizedek. Temple worship ceased with the destruction of the Temple by the Romans in 70 A.D. The Temple of God would now be in the bodies of those who accepted Jesus' sacrifice (1 Cor. 3:16). The Mosaic Law of Sacrifices and Ordinances was nailed to the tree (Col. 2:14) and the Old Covenant was replaced with the New and Better Covenant of Salvation, not only for the Jews but for the Gentiles too, who have been grafted in (Heb. 8:1-13; Rom. 11:11-24).

Almost two thousand years have passed since the execution of Jesus of Nazareth, and while His birth, life and death fulfilled a staggering array of prophecies, the Jews as a people have yet to open their eyes and their ears. They still anxiously await a Messiah, but just not the Messiah that they were given. The truth is, that because of their sins and their rejection of Christ, the children of Israel had been cursed for a time, *"He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them"* (John 12:40), and so when He came they could not recognize His divine authority or identity. But that condition, which allows for the Gentile nations to be brought in, is only temporary, and one day in the future the Lord Jesus will be revealed to them and they will know Him as their Messiah. They will recognize Him as the One they pierced and who suffered at their hands. *"For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery, lest you be wise in your own estimation, that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and thus all Israel will be saved"* (Rom. 11:25-26). *"And I will pour upon the*

house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn" (Zech. 12:10). *"And one shall say unto him, What are these wounds in thine hands? Then he shall answer, Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends"* (Zech. 13:6). *"And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation"* (Isa. 25:9).

Where Are They Now?

Within six years of the crucifixion of Jesus, both men most responsible for His execution, Jewish High Priest Caiaphas and Roman Governor Pontius Pilate, were removed from office. Josephus indicates that Pilate's career in Judea ended abruptly when he agitated his subjects one time too many and suddenly found himself on trial. After Pilate's removal, the new governor Vitellius deposed High Priest Caiaphas as well.

Although Annas had been officially deposed from the office of High Priest around 15 A.D., he was still called "High Priest" and remained a most influential political and social leader of the Temple, aided by his five sons who served as High Priest after him. The High Priesthood between the time of Caiaphas and the destruction of the Temple was filled with corruption and chaos, with at least sixteen men serving in the office of High Priest during those years.

Herod Antipas, the ruler of Galilee who had been involved in events that led to the executions of John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth, fell out of favor with Rome shortly after Jesus' death. In the summer of 39 A.D., his territory, wealth and possessions were turned over to his wife Herodias' brother, Agrippa, by the new emperor Caligula, and Antipas was sent into exile in Gaul. He died shortly thereafter. Josephus states definitely that Antipas died in Spain.

Herod Agrippa was made King Agrippa over the former realm of his uncle Philip the Tetrarch and of the adjoining regions, and ultimately possessed the entire kingdom of his grandfather, Herod the Great. He earned

the friendship of the Jews by pursuing orthodox Jewish policies, but vigorously persecuted the early Christian Church and killed James, the brother of John, with a sword, and cast Peter into prison. After Passover in 44 A.D. he went to Caesarea to attend a festival for Caesar, and while sitting on his throne, making a great speech to the people, they shouted out that his was the voice of a god and not a man. Immediately “...*the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost*” (Acts 12:1-25).

Herod Agrippa II was the son of Herod Agrippa. He was given the right of superintending the Temple in Jerusalem and of appointing its High Priest. Afterwards he was made king and governor over the tetrarch of Philip. Josephus records that Agrippa II lived in an incestuous relationship with his sister Berenice. It was before Agrippa and Berenice that the Apostle Paul delivered his speech recorded in Acts 26 around the year 59 A.D. Agrippa II was overthrown by his Jewish subjects in 66 A.D. and was the last ruler of the Herodian Dynasty. He died at Rome in about 100 A. D.

It has been said that Jerusalem has been fought over more than any other city in history. Between 66 A.D. and 136 A.D. the Jewish people staged a series of large scaled revolts against the Romans in the effort to restore an independent Jewish state. The Jewish-Roman Wars were a decided Roman victory and a disaster to Jewish society, causing destruction to the Temple and turning the Jewish nation into a scattered and persecuted minority. Return of the Jewish people to their ancestral homeland has only begun since the establishment of the modern state of Israel in 1948.

High Priests Annas and Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin continued to confront Jesus’ followers even after His death and played a leading part in the persecution of the early Church, whom they threatened, jailed, beat and stoned. The first martyr, Stephen, was murdered by stoning around 33 A.D. for spreading the news about Jesus (Acts 7:54-60). The same year Annas was present at a meeting of the Sanhedrin when Peter and John were brought in to defend themselves for preaching the Gospel of the Resurrection in the name of Jesus (Acts 4:6-10). Again in 33 A.D. they jailed Peter and others for teaching in the name of Jesus, and were questioned by the High Priest, and the Sanhedrin “took counsel to slay them”, until a

Pharisee named Gamaliel intervened to let them alone (Acts 5:29-42). Later on they dogged the Apostle Paul at every step. While on a missionary trip to Turkey around 45 A.D., Paul was stoned and dragged outside of Lystra by unbelieving Jews who supposed him to be dead (Acts 14:19). Around 60 A.D. he was seized and dragged out of the Temple in Jerusalem by Jews who tried to kill him during a riot, and was only saved when soldiers and centurions arrived to break up the beating (Acts 21:27-35). In addition to Bible accounts, Josephus writes that Annas wanted the death of Jesus’ brother James, who “was of an exceeding bold and reckless disposition” and gathered the Sanhedrin, accused James and others of violating the Law, and had them all stoned to death in 62 A.D.

Eight years later, in 70 A.D., Rome besieged and captured Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple, just as Jesus had predicted. The Arch of Titus, which stands on the main road of ancient Rome, celebrates this victory. The south panel depicts Temple spoils being carried off by Roman soldiers in a triumphant procession, with images of sacred objects such as the golden menorah, golden trumpets, pans used to remove ashes from the altar and the Table of Shew Bread.

With the destruction of the Temple, the priests no longer had a place to perform sacrifices, and there is currently no active Jewish priesthood. However, there is a movement to rebuild the Temple, and stories have circulated that there are men of Levitical descent in training in Israel ready to resume active priesthood upon its completion.

After the destruction of the Temple, the Sanhedrin moved to Galilee. By the late 200s the name Sanhedrin was dropped to avoid persecution, and its decisions were issued under the name of Beit Midrash (House of Learning). They were officially disbanded after continued persecution by the Eastern Roman Empire. Over the centuries, there have been attempts to re-establish this body, but none have been successful so far.

The Sadducee party existed because of their political and priestly ties to the Temple, and with its destruction in 70 A.D., the Sadducees disappeared from history.

Most of the “Jewish Christians” in Jerusalem were crushed, leaving Paul’s “Gentile branch” to continue spreading the Gospel throughout the Jewish and Gentile world. Christianity spread rapidly through evangelism which was enabled by the expansive road system,

infrastructure and cultural diversity of the Roman Empire, and through the universal use of the Greek language.

The Present Day Silent Years

It is true that since the close of the New Testament almost 2,000 years ago no new inspired words from God have been added to the Bible. But God has not left us alone. He has left us with all we need to know for our salvation and it is written in the pages of the Holy Scripture and can be found by anyone who cares to find it.

God is still working mightily, fulfilling prophecy and counting down to the time for Jesus to return to the earth. As world events change daily and hopelessness abounds, we can see how God is once again working out His awesome plan through the overthrowing of empires and the raising up of others, setting up rapidly changing world conditions to bring the history of this world system to a climax.

Conclusion

Jesus of Nazareth was not killed for the crime of blasphemy. We know this because the Jews themselves did not kill Him by stoning, which was the punishment under Jewish law. And we know this because He could not have been executed for blasphemy, because His claims were true. The fact that He was killed by crucifixion establishes that Jesus was executed as an offender of Roman law, but that was not true either, because He was innocent and did not deserve to die.

In Acts 2:22-23, the Apostle Luke says that the Jews crucified and killed Jesus “by the hands of lawless men”. In Acts 4:27-28 he tells us that “both Jews and the Gentiles killed Jesus”. The Sanhedrin was responsible for crucifying Jesus by using the Romans as a vehicle to actually carry out the act, and so it was ultimately both the Jews and the Gentiles who killed Jesus of Nazareth. His death and resurrection had profound spiritual implications, and completed God’s perfect Plan of Salvation that was put into place before the world began (II Timothy 1:8-9).

After researching hundreds of years of Jewish chastisement and domination by Gentile nations, and analyzing all the causes and events of how and why the

catastrophic rejection and murder of our Lord Jesus Christ could have happened, it seems evident that it was because Jesus’ death was essential in fulfilling the predestined Plan of Salvation of restoring man to God. And in the end, the answer to the “million dollar question” is not complicated at all. It was, simply put, God’s plan. . . .it just had to be.

NOTICE: We have recently gotten our secretary, Christy, a new computer due to a virus in the old computer. The seller of the computer did not properly transfer all the information from her old computer to the new one. Therefore, we have lost the mailing list for Sabbath School lessons. If you receive Sabbath School lessons, please send in your name, address, and the number of lesson books you want to receive. Our address is located on the inside cover of this Advocate. Thank you.

The Second Coming Of Jesus

By David DeLong

When the Lord calls forth the saints,
And the last trump sounds;
When they come forth from the graves
Of cemetery grounds.

When the living saints of God
Meet them in the air;
Then, they will ever be with Christ,
And in His glory, share.

They'll stand upon the Sea of Glass
To watch the plagues outpoured
Upon the wicked of the earth--
This wrath is from the Lord.

And for one-thousand holy years
The saints will reign with Christ;
They'll reign with Him upon the earth,
And have eternal life.

But, everyone who does offend,
Including every liar
Will have his part, so says the Lord,
In the Lake of Fire.

LESSON I

MEMORIAL OF THE PASSOVER

Scripture Reading: Exodus 12:37-47.

Golden Text: Exodus 12:42 (first part).

"It is a night to be much observed unto the LORD for bringing them out from the land of Egypt."

1. When the children of Israel left Egypt, into what land did they go? How many were there on this journey? Exodus 12:37.
2. Did they also have flocks and cattle? Exodus 12:38.
3. Had they prepared food to take with them? Exodus 12:39.
4. For how many years had they sojourned in the land of Egypt? Exodus 12:41.
5. What night was to be much observed by the children of Israel and why? Exodus 12:42.
6. What did the Lord call the Passover in Exodus 12:43?
7. Was a bone of the lamb to be broken? Exodus 12:46.
8. Was the whole congregation of Israel to keep the Lord's Passover? Exodus 12:47.

LESSON II

THE PASSOVER TO BE OBSERVED YEARLY

Scripture Reading: Exodus 13:1-10; 17-22.

Golden Text: Exodus 13:10.

"Thou shalt therefore keep this ordinance in his season from year to year."

1. What did the Lord say were to be His? Exodus 13:1-2.

2. What did Moses tell the people they must remember? Exodus 13:3.

3. In what month did they come out of Egypt? Exodus 13:4.

4. Where would the Lord bring the children of Israel, and were they to keep the Passover at the appointed time? Exodus 13:5.

5. What were they to eat for seven days before the Passover? Exodus 13:6-7.

6. What was it to be unto them, and how often were they to keep this ordinance? Exodus 13:9-10.

7. Why did God not lead His people through the land of the Philistines? Through what way did He lead them? Exodus 13:17-18.

8. Where did they first camp? Exodus 13:20.

9. What followed them by day and night? Exodus 13:21-22.

LESSON III

THE LORD LEADS ISRAEL

Scripture Reading: Exodus 14:1-14.

Golden Text: Exodus 14:14.

"The LORD shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace."

1. Where did the Lord tell Moses to have the children of Israel camp? Exodus 14:2.

2. What did Pharaoh say about them? Was Pharaoh's heart again hardened and why? Exodus 14:3-4.

3. Did Pharaoh follow the children of Israel? How many chariots and captains did he take with him? Exodus 14:5-8.

4. Where did the Egyptians find the Israelites? Exodus 14:9.
5. Were the children of Israel afraid? Did they seek the Lord? Exodus 14:10.
6. What did they say unto Moses in Exodus 14:11-12?
7. What did Moses promise the people that the Lord would do for them? Exodus 14:13-14.

LESSON IV

ISRAELITES PASS THROUGH THE RED SEA

Scripture Reading: Exodus 14:15-31.

Golden Text: Exodus 14:22 (first part).

"And the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground:..."

1. What did the Lord say to Moses and tell him to do in Exodus 14:15, 18?
 2. Where did the angel of the Lord move, and what did it cause to happen? Exodus 14:19-20.
- NOTE: This cloud kept the Egyptians from attacking the children of Israel during the night. The Egyptians saw darkness and the Israelites saw light.
3. What did the Lord cause to happen when Moses stretched out his hand over the sea? Exodus 14:21.
 4. Did the children of Israel go through on dry ground? Who followed them? Exodus 14:22-23.
 5. What did the Lord cause to trouble the Egyptians? Exodus 14:24-25.
 6. When Moses again stretched forth his hand, what happened to the water? Exodus 14:26-27.
 7. Did any of the Egyptians survive? Exodus 14:28.

8. The Lord saved Israel that day from the Egyptians. Did this cause the Israelites to fear and believe the Lord and his servant, Moses? Exodus 14:29-31.

WHO SAID IT?

Choose who said each statement from the list of choices below. Then put that number in the blank beside the statement. Some may have been said by more than one person. The answers are found in Genesis 24.

1. _____ "Take a wife unto my son Isaac" (verse 4).
2. _____ "Behold, I stand by the well of water" (verse 43).
3. _____ "I will give thy camels drink also" (verse 46).
4. _____ "Tell me: and if not, tell me" (verse 49).
5. _____ "The thing proceedeth from the LORD" (verse 50).
6. _____ "Send me away unto my master" (verse 54).
7. _____ "Let the damsel abide with us a few days" (verse 55).
8. _____ "I will go" (verse 58).
9. _____ "What man is this that walketh in the field to meet us?" (verse 65).
10. _____ "It is my master" (verse 65).

- A. SERVANT
- B. ABRAHAM
- C. LABAN
- D. BETHUEL
- E. REBEKAH
- F. MOTHER
- G. BROTHER

PSALM 23
CROSSWORD PUZZLE

How well do you know the 23rd Psalm? Try filling in the crossword puzzle without using your Bible.

The Lord is my (1 across); I shall not (12).

He maketh (13) to lie (7) in green (2): he leadeth me beside the still (8 down).

He restoreth my (24): he leadeth me in the (4) of righteousness for his name's (18).

Yea, though I (8 across) through the (20) of the (5 down) of (3), I will (23) no (15): for thou art with me; thy (7) and thy (5 across) they (16) me.

Thou preparest a (10) before me in the (21) of mine enemies: thou (11) my head with (6); my (19) runneth over.

Surely (14) and mercy (1 down) follow me all the (25) of my (22): and I will dwell in the house of the (9) for ever.

Answers to WHO SAID IT?

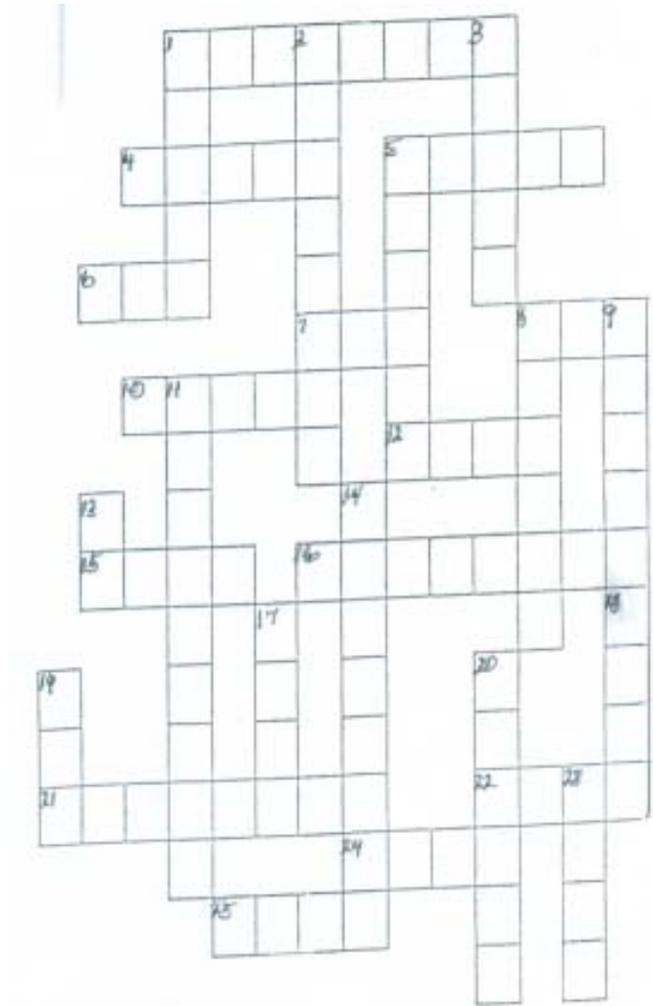
- 1. 2. 3.
- 4. 5. 6.
- 7. 8. 9.
- 10.

Verse for Fun

by Joan Robinson

- ___ is for light, created on day one.
- ___ is for Abel, Adam's son.
- ___ is for Noah, who preached to his kin.
- ___ is for doubt, which made Eve sin.

*Put them all together, LAND.
You have what God made on day number ___.*



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A Living Sacrifice

By David DeLong

To be transformed within our mind,
To always pay the price;
To live, as holy, unto God--
A living sacrifice.

This is what Christ wants of us,
It only will suffice;
A faithful service that we give,
A living sacrifice.

This we live from day to day,
And not just once, or twice;
It is our constant goal, to be
A living sacrifice.

We fight against sin's tempting lure,
To overcome all vice;
We pray for strength that we will be
A living sacrifice.

And though we fail the Lord, at times,
And let our flesh entice;
We pray to God to be again
A living sacrifice.

And God forgives us, once again,
And makes things, oh, so nice;
We dare not fail, to then avail
A living sacrifice.

