

Craig White

CRUCIFIXION - - historical events
Meaning/symbolism

by Kenneth C. Herrmann July 19, 1976

A Chronological view of the events of the week of the Crucifixion brings the Church of God understanding of Christ's sacrifice into sharp focus. The Worldwide Church of God understands:

1) That Jesus timed His final journey to Jerusalem to coincide with the Passover, knowing that He was the True Passover Lamb, the One appointed by the Father to be sacrificed for the sins of all mankind, a wholly innocent One, a Lamb without blemish.

2) That Jesus had completed a 3 1/2 year ministry and was "cut off . . . in the midst of the week" of years. And that He was also "cut off" in the midst of a literal week on a Wednesday, 3 days and 3 nights prior to His resurrection from the dead; the discovery of the empty tomb on a Sunday morning agrees with this arrangement.

3) That Jesus gave Himself as our Passover Lamb at the proper time "between the two evenings" (after sunset and before the time that the stars came out) by His statement to Judas, "That which thou dost, do quickly" but that the unrighteous religious leaders delayed that death till 3 in the afternoon of Nisan 14, the time they chose to kill their Passover Lambs.

4) That from that Nisan 14 of 31 A.D. the Jewish community ceased the afternoon sacrificing Passover lambs. It is entirely possible and certainly strongly probable that the darkness that covered the earth from noon till three, the last three hours of Jesus' life, severely curtailed their practice on that day of the Crucifixion. History and tradition tell of the cessation of the practice of killing Passover lambs, except by a Samaritan community which continues to observe the proper time on the evening of the 14th.

5) In their zeal to totally expunge the events of that day from their memories, tradition records that Lazarus, Mary the mother of Jesus, and others were set adrift on the Mediterranean with the intent that they should die, but the Jewish religious leaders rigorously holding to the tenet that they could not carry out the "ministration of death" themselves. The ones who kept guard over the Garden Tomb were bribed to insist that Christ's disciples stole His body away. The faulty practice of killing Passover lambs at 3 in the afternoon (to be eaten with the Feast the evening of the 15th) ceased. An intensive campaign followed in the next years to put Christians to death by stoning; thus it would appear that the Jewish religious leaders resumed the "ministration of death" rather than to accept the Sacrifice of the True Passover Lamb with its accompanying doctrine of mercy and forgiveness.

6) That during His ministry and especially in the last months and days, Christ had actually provoked the assignment of the death penalty on Himself by telling the truth, openly and in parables, that He was the Son of God (the Father), the One with authority to forgive sins, to heal, to raise the dead. It was the act of raising Lazarus from the dead that incited the religious leaders to determine to kill Him. John's account moves directly from this incident to Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem.

7) He timed His arrival in Bethany on a Friday, Nisan 9 the preparation day for the weekly Sabbath, and found a supper prepared for Him. Mary anoints His feet and He explains it is preparation for His burying. (A later anointing takes place, again in Bethany, the evening of Nisan 13, a day prior to His last Passover with the disciples.) He had prepared for His Nisan 10 ride to the city

ly sending two disciples ahead to Bethany to obtain a young donkey that had never been ridden, and therefore would be available for a short Sabbath day's ride. Animals that had worked six days were to be allowed rest that day. Yet He was required to fulfil a prophecy by arriving as their King riding a colt.

8) The morning of Nisan 10 when Jesus rode toward Jerusalem, He received a wholehearted welcome from the people. Jews from Greece, whose minds had not been poisoned by the religious leaders of Jerusalem, expressed a genuine interest in seeing Him. It may safely be assumed that He spent a good measure of time with these Hellenistic Jews and others also who wanted to see Him. By Nature, He would have taken time with any genuinely interested people. He then searched out a place of seclusion for the remainder of the Sabbath and only appeared to inspect the Temple area shortly before sunset.

9) It is stated that He taught daily in the Temple; and thus we should expect to find teaching Sunday, Monday, Tuesday. Luke repeats in 21:37 what he writes in 19:47, that Christ was day by day in the temple, and nights in Bethany; hence we should logically find an account of each day's activities.

10) In His teaching He is repeatedly presenting Himself openly and unmistakably as God's Son, and rightly accusing the Pharisees that they are planning His murder. His claim to be a Son of God (and hence God, which claim is further demonstrated by allowing people to worship Him,) is in Levitical law a cause worthy of death, unless of course the claim is true. However, at this time the Jewish nation was not carrying out the "ministration of death" (the "service" of death, i.e. the death penalty) but only passing judgment and turning the condemned over to the Romans for execution.

11) The Sunday morning examination of the flourishing yet barren fig typifies Christ coming to the Jewish nation under the Old Covenant and finding it barren of any Spiritual fruit. It is the Levitical system that is being examined and cursed, and truly it bore no further fruit. No further Scripture, no further Prophets, no Spiritual fruit.

12) Yet it is important to note the legal role of the priesthood and Sanhedrin in subsequent events. The apprehension and trial of Jesus were properly under their jurisdiction. "The scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses seat"; and even years later Paul apologized for his abusive language to the Levitical High Priest he had failed to recognize. The task of managing the Sacred Calendar and announcing new moons remained in the hands of this Levitical priesthood. Knowledge of the Calendar's basic principles was only made public at the fall of the temple in 70 A.D. A complete knowledge of its adjustments is still being searched out even today. While it is recognized that the Sacred Calendar has crept forward in the seasons, no unordained individual dares touch it. That problem awaits a new duly constituted Sanhedrin. Thus the Levitical system continued past the Crucifixion, yet only in a maintenance capacity. There is no further fruit.

13) The Sunday morning cleaning of the Temple was a demonstration of His right to be in charge of the House of God and a challenge to the "strong men" "who sat in Moses' seat". He taught in the Temple that day (Luke 19:46, 47).

14) Monday morning, the fig tree is found dead. The One whose Life had sustained even the life of the plant world had withdrawn His life support. "In Him we live and move and have our being."

he presents Himself as the son of the owner of the vineyard; since the vineyard is the earth and the Owner is God, Jesus has declared Himself God's Son. The rejection of Him by the Levitical priesthood of that day led to the parable of the "Stone that the Builders rejected."

15) The determination of to have Him arrested was continually thwarted by crowds. He was either teaching a crowd, or in seclusion, on the Mount of Olives, or in Bethany at night. The night of the 14th at Jerusalem provided the opportunity they sought. Judas had gone to them 24 hours earlier.

16) Monday is filled with teaching by parables. As He leaves the Temple, He prophecies its destruction.

17) As Sunset and Nisan 13 approach, He leaves the Temple area and finds a convenient location to be seated on the Mount of Olives directly across from the Temple. It is from this location and as the sun is setting that He delivers the "Sermon on the Mount", one evening before His final Passover with the disciples at sundown it is two days before the "Passover of the Jews". Note the three accounts:

Matthew 26:2 "Ye know that after two days is the feast of the passover, and the Son of man is betrayed to be crucified." (The betrayal will precede the the Crucifixion by half a day.)

Mark 14:1 "After two days was the feast of the passover, and of unleavened bread."

Luke 22:1 "Now the feast of unleavened bread drew nigh, which is called the Passover."

These passages are parallel and show that the term "Passover" was being used to refer to the Feast night, Nisan 15, the night that was to be observed in

memory of the Exodus from Egypt. Strictly and properly used, the term Passover would refer only to the night of the 14th, the night that children of Israel had partaken of roast lamb, the Passover lamb, and remained in their houses obediently until sunrise. At that time they burned all the inedible portion and received the news of the death of the first born of the Egyptians and the instructions to actually leave Egypt.

18) That "God (the Father) gave His only begotten Son" that the world should not perish, just as over 19 centuries earlier Abraham was told on Nisan 10 to take his only son, to go a three day journey to the vicinity of Jerusalem "in the land of Moriah . . . upon one of the mountains which I (will) tell thee of." (Genesis 22:2) Arriving at the threshing floor where the Temple would later stand, Abraham saw a mountain that could be described, Golgotha the Place of the Skull. Even today 19 centuries later, it retains the same appearance. Leaving the servants, he and Isaac (now age 25) went forward to the site that would later become the place of the Crucifixion. The question Isaac asks, "where is the lamb to sacrifice?" The answer, "God will provide a Lamb."

The Father places his son on the altar; the son willingly allows himself to be placed on the altar; what is placed on the altar is offered even though the actual death penalty is not carried out. Isaac, as a type of Christians, was required to present himself as "a Living Sacrifice", but not necessarily as a martyr. This brings to mind the words of Paul, "Though I give my body to be burned and have not love . . ." it would be insufficient to fill the requirements of Christianity. In a demonstration of faith, Isaac had placed his life on the altar, an innocent "lamb", knowing that God would "provide a Lamb" and that a resurrection awaited him; he was willing to trust his father Abraham and to trust God. What two humans, Abraham and Isaac demonstrated, God the Father and His Son Jesus carried out step by step 19 centuries later with the same faith and trust.

Jesus faced this same dilemma, and asked His Father, "If it be Thy Will, let this cup (this death penalty and the preceding torture inflicted by the Romans) pass from me. But Jesus being the "Lamb that God would provide", for Him there was no substitute, no ram caught fast in the thicket and slowly dying, to take His place. Instead, He Himself was fastened "to a tree" by Roman soldiers and His slow, agonizing death began.

19) A preliminary fulfilment of a prophecy of Joel concerning the darkening of the sun and moon took place. (The final fulfilment is still ahead. (Matt. 24:29) The darkness that covered the earth from noon till three o'clock was not an eclipse of the sun, for the moon was almost 180 degrees away and would not rise that evening until about 6:30 p.m. The Scriptures assign no cause to this event of darkness; yet it was prophesied by Joel, "The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible day of the LORD come, And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the LORD hath said, and in the remnant whom the LORD shall call. (Joel 2:10, 31, 32) Peter quotes this as having been fulfilled. (Acts 2:19-21)

Consider the matter further and ask, Where is the turning of the moon to blood? The date of the Crucifixion is Wednesday, April 25, 31 A.D. (Julian). A check of Oppolzer's Eclipse Tables shows a partial lunar eclipse occurring at 10:45 p.m. (Jerusalem time), its beginning would have been about an hour earlier and its ending shortly before midnight! For two hours the moon was partly covered by the shadow of the earth and certainly shone with a reddish hue. Since this lunar eclipse occurred after sunset at Jerusalem, it was now Nisan 15 on the Hebrew Calendar. People observing the Feast of the Passover could not miss seeing this event.

It was the time of the full moon, and it was during an eclipse season (though not at the middle of one which would have produced a total lunar eclipse), and thus the lunar eclipse was not surprise to any one; but the totally unexpected and unexplainable darkening of the sun for three hours the preceding afternoon caught all mankind off guard. The solar darkening followed by the lunar eclipse surely brought the prophecy of Joel to mind, and the Resurrection of the One who had been ^{on} the cross during that darkness must have provided an even more convincing picture.

(Six lunar calendar months later on October 19, the day preceding the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles, another partial lunar eclipse took place, its midpoint at 5:42 in the morning of October 19. At sunset on that day, Tishri 15 the first day of the fall festival began.)

20) It is interesting to speculate the effect of the darkening of the sun and moon on the activities that were scheduled for that afternoon of Nisan 14, and for the after sundown celebration of Nisan 15, the night in which Israel left Egypt. For the followers of Jesus it must have been a time of bewilderment, having been so convinced that He indeed was the One who should free them from their burdens, then hearing of His arrest, trial, crucifixion and burial. Yet with it was this unusual period of darkness. Prophecy was certainly being fulfilled, yet not as they had expected.

It was the proper decade for the arrival of the Messiah; all nations had been looking forward to the arrival of a Ruler who would free them from the oppression of the Roman Empire. And the ^{*}astronomers (and astrologers) had predicted the time of His arrival to be when Jupiter had overtaken Saturn in the Sign of Pisces. This had taken place some thirty years previous to the

beginning of Christ's ministry. The triple conjunction of these two planets occurring in 7 B.C. did not by itself foretell the arrival of the Messiah, but was a memory device used by men familiar with astronomy who had read Daniel's prophecy of the seventy weeks, and looking ahead counted off the time in twenties (the period in which Jupiter overtakes Saturn). Each third conjunction is in approximately the same background of stars, but a few degrees further to the east; hence the prediction that mankind would have to suffer the injustices of wicked rulers until a Jupiter-Saturn conjunction should occur in the Sign of the Fish. Astronomers used the heavens as a clockface and the planets as time indicators.

21) Then consider the dilemma of the Jews who had neglected to observe the evening (dark part after sundown) of the Nisan 14, but delayed in the killing of their lambs until the afternoon of Nisan 14 twelve hours later. The darkness that overspread the earth, as the One who claimed to be the Lamb of God that would take away the sins of the world hung dying on the cross must have had considerable impact on their heretical practice. The event of darkness is not described fully; events continued to transpire that afternoon. Were they by torchlight only? Perhaps the scheduled afternoon killing of the lambs was halted entirely and could only have been carried out after 3 o'clock. History does tell us that from the time of the Crucifixion forward, the practice of the Jews of killing Passover lambs ceased. Those who were followers of Jesus certainly changed to the symbols of the bread and the wine. Yet there must be an explanation for the cessation of the practice by the non-Christian Jewish community.

They would have remembered that the Exodus from Egypt on the night of Nisan 15 was 430 years to the selfsame day from the "Passover" covenant with Abraham at

age 99. And certainly Christ's Apostles, now filled with the Holy Spirit, reminded them of the sacrifice of Isaac (presumably also at "Passover" time) and the last minute substitution of a ram that God provided.

The faulty practice of the Jews of combining the eating of the Passover lamb (which should have been done on the 14th) with the Feast of the Passover (Nisan 15, the memorial of their departure from Egypt) was exposed. The choice of the chief priests, scribes and Pharisees was not whether this One was the True Passover Lamb but whether they were willing to accept Him as such. They chose to bribe the tomb keepers; set adrift on the Mediterranean in an open boat Lazarus, Mary and others. The most compelling evidence was now gone. The next step was to drive out or kill off all Christians. And to cease the afternoon killing of lambs altogether.

The topic of the Crucifixion is endless. Omitted items include:

22) The injustice of Jesus' trial. This is covered thoroughly in an article by Dr. Hoeh.

23) Which laws ceased with the cross. Again I think Dr. Hoeh is the author.

24) The various booklets regarding the correct year and date for the Passover at which Jesus was crucified. A good measure of history and chronology is associated.

25) "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the son of man be lifted up."

26) That the death of Christ was due to loss of blood, not a "broken heart".

27) That the time of His death came with the spear wound of a Roman soldier and subsequent loss of blood.

28) That the tearing of the Temple curtain from top to bottom occurred at the same time the "temple of His body" was torn by the spear of the soldier.

29) The wave sheaf offering was a type of Christ, fulfilled by His arrival in Heaven before God the Father on that Sunday, and then later returns to allow mankind to touch Him.

30) That a period of 3 days and 3 nights in the grave is an absolute requirement. His quotation of Jonah's 3 days and 3 nights would have brought questions from His hearers if His proposed time in the grave were any different from Jonah's experience.

31) That Christ, as the One who had created Adam, was in the final analysis responsible for the situation on earth and planned to give His Life in payment for the results of "Free Moral Agency" even before the Creation. Dr. Boeh put out an article, I Hold God Responsible!

32) That no prophet can die outside Jerusalem. . (?)

33) That there could be no sin in His having ridden a previously unriden colt toward Jerusalem on the weekly Sabbath, in that the Priests of the Temple profane the Sabbath and are blameless; here is One who instituted the Sabbath and had the position of High Priest of the order of Melchisedec carrying out a requirement of prophecy with regard to Himself.

Craig White