

AN OFFERING FOR SIN

Mel Gibson, in his new film, “The Passion of the Christ,” adopted what is referred to as “atonement theology,” which was, in fact, the principle approach to Easter by the Catholic church up until the end of the Second World War.

Subsequent to that, the Catholic church together with many Protestant churches, changed their approach to the death of Christ, and instead of focusing upon His death, they focused upon His life. Having gone from one extreme, they went to the other. In reality, the life and the death of Christ needs to be considered as a whole.

Atonement theology has been the focus of that church since probably the 2nd century. It gave rise to many of the excesses within the church in terms of their attitude towards the Jews.

Mel Gibson, in promoting his film, claimed that it was “historically accurate.” I have read many accounts of academics who were approached by Mel Gibson and his crew, asking for input – which was given, and totally ignored!

In some cases, when reviews were provided of what was done, people were even threatened with lawsuits. Yet all of the material about the film claims that it is “historically accurate.” That is a broad statement, a generalisation.

If Mel Gibson can make generalisations, so can I! So let me give you a generalisation: most concepts in the minds of people relating to the trial and the death of Christ are ill-informed – and have been for 1900-plus years, because it is taken out of context. They do not understand what happened.

I attended a lecture at one of the local universities recently on the “Passion of the Christ.” A number of professors were debating the pros and cons of the film. One professor got to the point of answering a question relating to the film, and whether he would recommend that people see it. He was lamenting the fact that a film can set in peoples’ minds what “really happened.” He parroted a comment that he received from his students: “I’ve seen the film, why should I read the book?”

The professors who were addressing this seminar were rather concerned that the film was not necessarily RELIABLE in terms of its use of sources! That is why I made that generalisation.

The film is not based on the sources, or if it is, it is based on a misinterpretation of the sources.

Today I want to take you to the sources, not only in God’s word, but even to some of the extra-biblical sources of what actually happened during that period of time so that we can put this into its proper context and we can understand it. You will then be able to understand why I can make a generalised comment such as: “Most concepts in the minds of people relating to the trial and the death of Christ are ill-informed.” I hope that by the time we have finished today, you will realise just HOW ill-informed people, who claim to be Christians, really are about the death of Christ in many major ways.

AN OFFERING FOR SIN

Let's start with the most important source. Let's start with the Word of God and the very last chapter of the book of Hebrews. The book of Hebrews talks about Jesus Christ, about the role that the Father gave to Him, and His relationship to us today as our High Priest. One of the roles that He has is as our High Priest.

The book of Hebrews, as a whole, is set in terms of the ancient nation of Israel in the wilderness. It looks at the form of religion that God gave to the children of Israel in the wilderness, with the tabernacle, the priesthood and the sacrificial systems.

Paul, in writing the book of Hebrews, says:

Hebrews 13:9 Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines. For it is good that the heart be established by grace, not with foods which have not profited those who have been occupied with them.

Coming to the end of this book, Paul is concerned that people not be carried about with various and strange doctrines.

So what does he do to help people to focus upon the right doctrine in relation to Christ? He continues:

10 We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat.

11 For the bodies of those animals, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned outside the camp.

12 Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate.

13 Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach.

14 For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come.

This is a very heavily laden section of Scripture. It is impossible in the time we have this afternoon to go into all of the aspects that Paul has compressed into this section of Scripture, but I would like you to focus upon three important points that Paul conveys to us in this particular section.

- Firstly, he talks about an altar from which food is not eaten. He talks about us, as Christians, as members of God's body, having access to that altar. What altar is that?
- He talks about being "outside the camp." What does it mean to be outside the camp? What did it mean for Christ to suffer outside the camp?
- In verse 12, He talks about the purpose being for sanctification of those inside the camp because they have to go out to Christ to be sanctified. They are already inside the camp and there is a need to go out to Christ to be sanctified.

So let's have a look at these three points.

AN OFFERING FOR SIN

Ask yourself, how many altars do you know of, associated with the Temple? Most of you would think of the altar of burnt offering.

A number of years ago, an Israeli produced a representation of this altar, together with a model of the tabernacle. They can still be seen in Jerusalem to this day. It's interesting to see what the altar would have looked like with the horns, and with the staves whereby it could be carried through the wilderness.

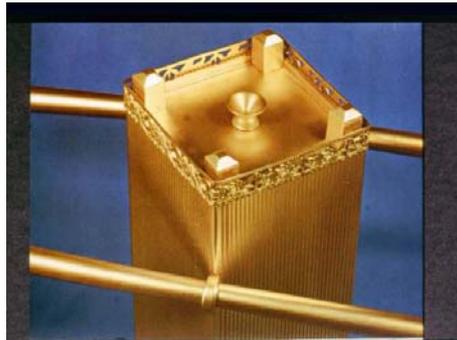


This particular altar stood before the tabernacle. It was the altar on which the offerings were made. Anyone offering a peace offering or a freewill offering could eat from the offering, as could the priesthood. So clearly it is not this altar that the apostle Paul is talking about, because he said:

10 We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat.

A member of the community of Israel had a right to eat from the bronze altar, the altar of burnt offering. The priesthood had a right to eat from this particular altar.

There is another altar: the golden altar. It was a beautiful golden construction.



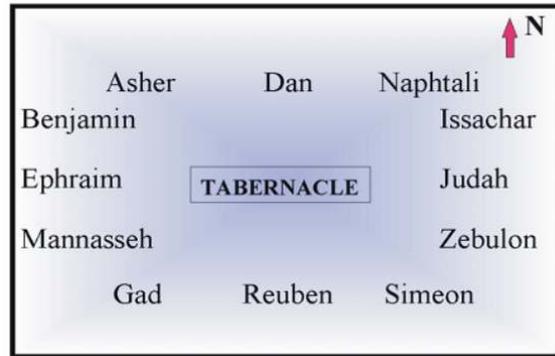
Where did this one stand? This altar stood inside the tabernacle, in the holy place. Being inside the tabernacle, who had access to it? Only the priesthood. Two priests a day went into the tabernacle, into the holy place, to burn incense on the altar as they trimmed the light and the candelabra. The High Priest saw it once a year as he went into the Holy of Holies.

What was offered on this altar? You know already. It was the golden altar of incense. We don't eat incense! What is more, this was not accessible to people, so

AN OFFERING FOR SIN

clearly it was not this altar that the apostle Paul was talking about in the book of Hebrews. He talked about an altar that was outside the camp. In writing the book of Hebrews, Paul draws upon the experiences of Israel in the wilderness. When he talks about it being “outside the camp,” he is using the expression that applied to the congregation in the wilderness.

They encamped. How did they encamp? The tabernacle was pitched in the middle of the camp. The twelve tribes were distributed around each of the four sides.



Judah was directly to the east, Ephraim to the west, Dan to the north and Reuben to the south. In the middle, the priests and Levites encamped around the tabernacle.

The black line which has been drawn around the side represents the limits of the camp. To go outside the camp, meant to go outside that area. The area within the black line, within the camp, had to be kept clean because the Eternal dwelt with them! If anybody became unclean or if they had a disease, they had to go outside the camp.

So the term “outside the camp” is used. When the term is used in terms of people, it is used generally. No specific place is mentioned. If someone from the tribe of Reuben had to go outside the camp, presumably they went somewhere adjacent to the tribe of Reuben so that the family could provide them with food.

If it was someone from Dan, he would be outside the camp, adjacent to the tribe of Dan. That way, he didn’t have to walk all the way round the camp to get some sustenance, or the family didn’t have to walk a great distance to bring things to him.

When a person went “outside the camp,” it could be a very general statement. They were just outside the perimeter of the camp. But when the term is related to the tabernacle or the Temple, it is used very specifically. It is not a general term. It becomes a very specific term.

Let’s look at some of the references in God’s word to the term, “outside the camp.”

Leviticus 4 details the way in which sin offerings were to be offered in the tabernacle, and what was to be done with the animal.

AN OFFERING FOR SIN

Leviticus 4:12 'the whole bull he shall carry outside the camp to a clean place ...

Generally speaking, any place outside the camp was considered an unclean place, and the camp itself was considered clean.

But here in Leviticus, the instruction is that the bull that had been offered for a sin offering, was to be carried outside the camp to a clean place ...

12 ... where the ashes are poured out, and burn it on wood with fire; where the ashes are poured out it shall be burned.

The same instructions are repeated later in the chapter. Another sin offering is being offered on this occasion. Once again, Moses, under the inspiration of the Eternal, tells the children of Israel and the priesthood:

20 'And he shall do with the bull as he did with the bull as a sin offering; thus he shall do with it. So the priest shall make atonement for them, and it shall be forgiven them.

21 'Then he shall carry the bull outside the camp, and burn it as he burned the first bull. It is a sin offering for the assembly.

One sin offering it was associated with is the Day of Atonement.

Leviticus 16:27 "The bull for the sin offering and the goat for the sin offering (notice that two sin offerings were made on that day), whose blood was brought in to make atonement in the Holy Place, shall be carried outside the camp. And they shall burn in the fire their skins, their flesh, and their offal.

On the Day of Atonement, not even the offal, the inwards of the animal, was burned on the altar of burnt offering. Everything was burned OUTSIDE the camp.

The sin offerings were burned outside the camp, in a specific place, in a clean place. You may have noticed that it wasn't only the sin offerings that were taken outside the camp. Leviticus 4:12 shows that the ashes from the altar of burnt offering were also taken outside the camp, to a specified place.

Leviticus 4:12 'the whole bull (the sin offering) he shall carry outside the camp to a clean place, where the ashes are poured out, and burn it on wood with fire; where the ashes are poured out it shall be burned.

There was a specified place, outside the camp, where the ashes from the altar of burnt offering were taken out and stacked. At that place, the sin offering had to be offered. It was considered a "clean" place, a sanctified place, outside the camp, where the offering could be made.

AN OFFERING FOR SIN

Leviticus 6:10-11 talks about the way in which the priest had to take the ashes off the altar, stack them alongside the altar, and then undergo a change of clothing. He had to get out of his linen clothes and put on his other clothes.

Leviticus 6:10 ‘And the priest shall put on his linen garment, and his linen trousers he shall put on his body, and take up the ashes of the burnt offering which the fire has consumed on the altar, and he shall put them beside the altar.

11 ‘Then he shall take off his garments, put on other garments, and carry the ashes outside the camp to a clean place.

... to a specified place. So this term “outside the camp” meant that there was a specified place outside the camp. This term is used in terms of the tabernacle in yet another way – in terms of the sacrifice of the red heifer.

Numbers 19:2 ... ‘Speak to the children of Israel, that they bring you a red heifer without blemish, in which there is no defect and on which a yoke has never come.

3 ‘You shall give it to Eleazar the priest, that he may take it outside the camp, and it shall be slaughtered before him;

9 ‘Then a man who is clean shall gather up the ashes of the heifer, and store them outside the camp in a clean place; and they shall be kept for the congregation of the children of Israel for the water of purification; it is for purifying from sin.

When a person had sinned, or had become impure, they were to go to this place. They would take a little of the ashes, which they would sprinkle on the water for purification, and then bathe in it. They would then become clean. The red heifer became a very important aspect of the purification rituals of the children of Israel.

Let’s move on from the book of Leviticus to a later period of time. Let’s scroll forward some 900 years to the time of Ezekiel.

Ezekiel was a priest. He was in captivity in Babylon. God gave him visions of the Temple that was to be built in the future. Notice the way in which Ezekiel talks about the sin offering in terms of the Temple:

Ezekiel 43:21 ‘Then you shall also take the bull of the sin offering, and burn it in the appointed place of the temple, outside the sanctuary.

It wasn’t just a “clean” place now. It was now an “appointed” place, a place that has been ESTABLISHED. The camp is not now moving from location to location in the wilderness. The Temple has been built in Jerusalem. Once the Temple was built in Jerusalem, there was an appointed place for the sin offering to be burned. The burning of the sin offering was not a haphazard or casual event.

So there is a third altar. It existed for the burning of sin offerings and for purification. It was located outside of the camp and sanctuary, yet in its own way, it

AN OFFERING FOR SIN

was an extension of the sanctuary. It was a location that was ritually clean. Various sources record that there were baths associated with this, so that those who were involved in the rites of burning the sin offering, or handling the ashes of the red heifer, could bathe and be clean.

It was also a place to which unclean people would come for purification, so that they could then enter the Temple. So it was a very public place. It was not a private place. Its purpose was so that people could be cleansed so as to enter a relationship with God within His Temple. They then had the ability to enter into the Temple and participate in the sacrifices of the Temple.

Where was this altar? It was on the Mount of Olives – directly across the Kidron Valley from the Temple.

As I said, I was going to refer to some other sources today. Let's refer to the *Mishnah*. The *Mishnah* was a collection of rules and regulations of the Jews which they started to collect around two centuries before Christ, and which eventually became the "oral law" about the time of Rabbi Judah about 200 A.D. This material had been collected over a period of almost 400 years. It eventually became the foundation for the *Talmud*, which you have no doubt heard of, together with the *Gemara* and commentaries of the various rabbis.

There is a tractate in the *Mishnah* which deals purely with the Temple, and describes the Temple. Anyone who is going to understand the Temple has to look at this particular tractate of the *Mishnah*, and Josephus, to understand what the Temple was like. This is what Middoth 4:1 says of the Temple, and of this altar:

Mishnah: Middoth 4.1 "All the walls of the temple were high except the eastern wall, so that the priest who burnt the red heifer might while standing on the top of the Mount of Olives by directing his gaze carefully see the door of the Hekal at the time of the sprinkling of the blood."

The *Hekal* is the Temple building itself, with the holy place and the Holy of Holies. The way in which the *Mishnah* goes on to describe it, it would appear that the priest was, in fact, able to see not only the outer door of the *Hekal*, the Temple, but he was actually able to see inside the Temple to the veil that separated the holy place from the Holy of Holies!

This altar upon which the red heifer and sin offerings were burned, was in a direct line of sight with the Holy of Holies! The priest, by looking down from the Mount of Olives to the Temple Mount, would be able to see right into the innermost being of the Temple, the holy place and see the veil that separated the holy place from the Holy of Holies. Let's look at the Temple Mount. In the picture at the top of the next page, we have purged the area of everything and re-erected the Temple:

AN OFFERING FOR SIN



Looking at it from the Mount of Olives, you can appreciate the elevations involved, whereby you can look down onto the Temple, and see the outer veil to the Temple. If that were open, and if the doors were open, you could, in fact, see inside.

This is added to by the fact that the Jews built something else in terms of the Temple, in terms of the red heifer and the altar of the sin offering. They built a bridge across the Kidron upon which to take the red heifer to be offered so that it didn't get mixed up with other animals along the way.

The bridge was constructed in a particular way, so that the priest taking the red heifer across to the sacrificial point was able to do so without mixing with other people, other animals, and above all else, without becoming unclean because he had walked upon a grave. That is why the bridge was built in the particular way it was, so that the top part of the bridge was not resting upon something which was directly on top of a grave.



The altar had to be “outside the camp.” What was the “camp” in the 1st century? What was the “camp” in terms of that Temple? We can very easily see it in terms of the tabernacle in the wilderness. All the tribes were around the tabernacle. A limit was put around the tribes, and outside that limit was outside the camp.

But we now have a nation, so what is the “camp”? How did they define the camp? It was not just the Temple and its environs. It was the camp of Israel, so it required more than just the Temple to be outside the camp.

It appears that with the building of Herod's Temple, the Sanhedrin established a limit of 2,000 cubits from the Temple which specified “the camp.” If you were to draw a line from the Temple of 2,000 cubits, you had what was then considered to be the camp of Israel.

AN OFFERING FOR SIN

Within that camp, execution was not able to be undertaken. A person was not allowed to be stoned to death within that area. A person was not allowed to be buried within that area.

It is rather interesting, that in terms of the archaeology of Jerusalem to this day, no tombs, from the time of Christ or up until the end of the Temple, are found within 2,000 cubits of the Temple! Even the most prominent people who could claim the right to have been buried close to the Temple, are all buried outside that 2,000 cubit limit.

The tombs of the Herods are over 2,000 cubits to the west. The tomb of Caiaphas, the High Priest, was over 2,000 cubits to the south. The tombs of all the other notables, were all outside that 2,000 cubit limit.

The death penalty was not enacted within the camp itself. It was enacted outside of the camp – according to Leviticus:

***Leviticus 24:13 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,
14 "Take outside the camp him who has cursed; then let all who heard him lay their hands on his head, and let all the congregation stone him.***

Let me ask: how do you explain Matthew 23:29?

Matthew 23:29 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous,

What tombs of the prophets were the Scribes and the Pharisees building or adorning? The only prophet we read of, contemporaneous with Jesus Christ, is John the Baptist. There is no comment about him being buried in Jerusalem.

So who were these prophets that the Scribes and Pharisees were building tombs for, or decorating tombs for? Just north-west of Jerusalem, about a mile from the Temple, there is a collection of tombs that dates to the early part of the first century. They are somewhat highly decorated. They have been referred to as *Sanhedria* – “of the Sanhedrin.”

It has been suggested that what Jesus Christ was talking about here was the fact that the Pharisees were in the process of taking care of any OLD tombs WITHIN the 2,000 cubit limit, and moving them outside of it. In the process, they then had to build new tombs, and decorate them.

Many of the ossuaries that have been found in THOSE tombs apparently were HIGHLY decorated, whereas many of the ossuaries of that period of time were very simple and very plain. They weren't decorated at all. If the person had a highly decorated ossuary, this indicated that there was something very special about them.

AN OFFERING FOR SIN

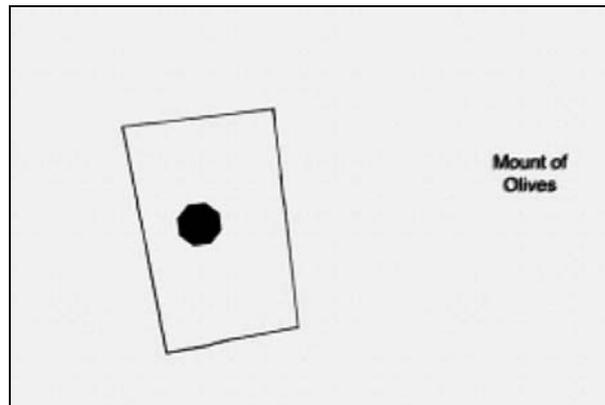
Jesus was criticising these people for building tombs to the prophets, and adorning the monuments of the righteous. The most likely reason that they were building tombs to the prophets was to remove their remains from within that 2,000 cubit limit, outside of it.

Let's look at the geography of Jerusalem for a few moments and consider the impact of this.

Let's start with two items: firstly, the Mount of Olives in the east, and the Temple Mount. For the purpose of this exercise, I have taken the fact that the Temple Mount as it presently stands, was in fact, the Temple Mount in the time of Christ. Some people dispute that. It is said that with any two Jews you will have three opinions!

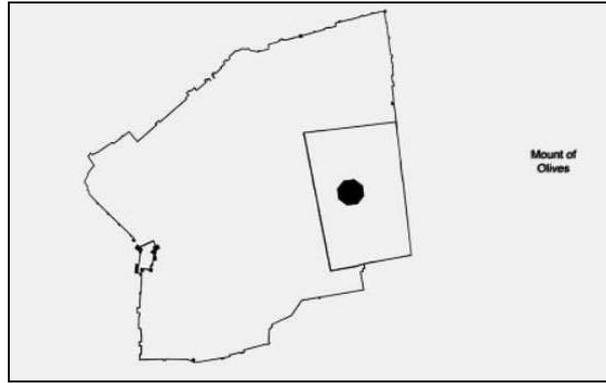
I have also accepted the idea, with reason, that the Temple itself was built on the stone that is presently part of the Dome of the Rock. People have come up with all sorts of ideas. You might say that the Temple has been "rebuilt" on every inch of the Temple Mount. People have all sorts of ideas for locating the Temple at various places on the Temple Mount. I believe there is good reason to justify the rock underneath the Dome of the Rock as the location of the Temple.

The two points in the next picture are in their exact geographic relationship with one another:



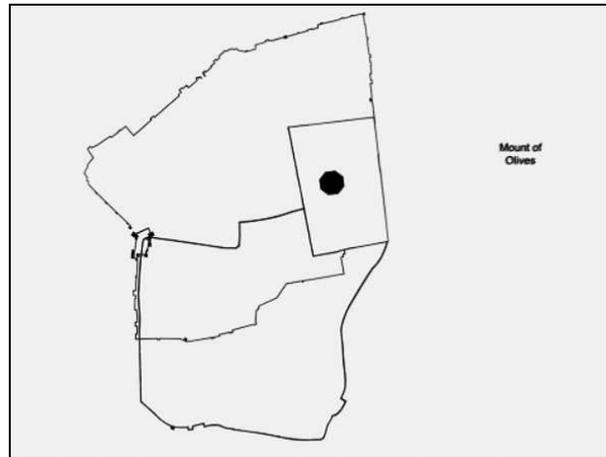
If we look at Jerusalem today, we have what is referred to as the "Old City" represented by the wall. The walls are nothing to do with the time of Jesus Christ. They were built and re-built and re-re-built by various Muslim rulers of Jerusalem over the years (*see diagram at top of next page*).

AN OFFERING FOR SIN

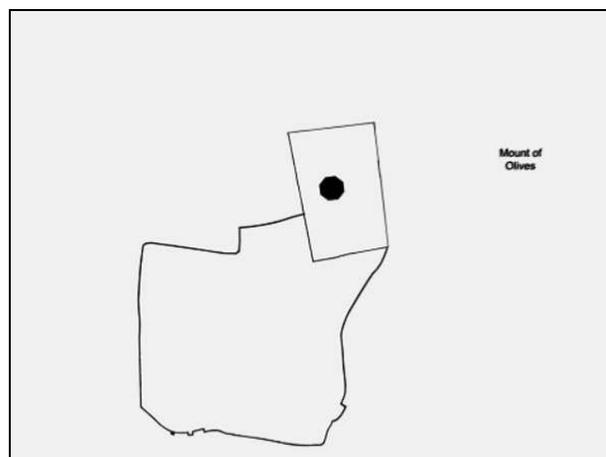


There were periods of time in Jerusalem's history when Jerusalem had no walls at all. It was thought that the safest way for Jerusalem to protect itself from opponents, was to remove the walls because of some of the carnage that had taken place.

The walls around what we call the "old city" today are not the real walls of Jerusalem. The walls of Jerusalem in the time of Christ were these:



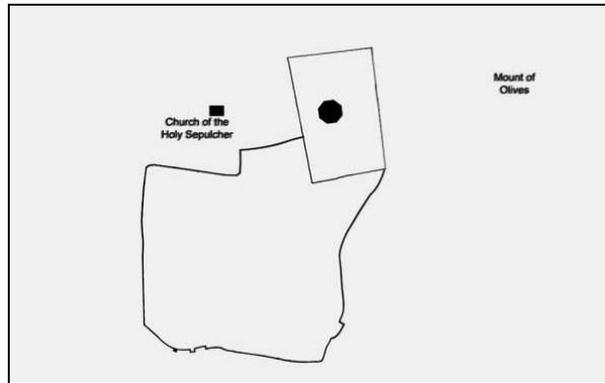
Let's take away the Islamic additions, and look at the walls of Jerusalem at the time of Christ:



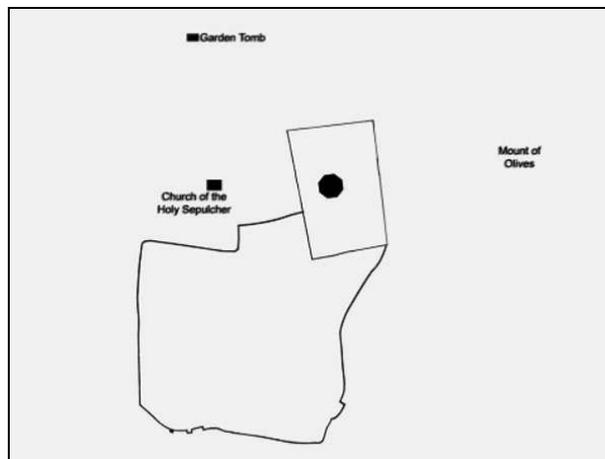
AN OFFERING FOR SIN

Subsequent to the time of Christ, another wall was built up around the north end of the Temple, and possibly even another wall even further to the north, before the Roman invasion in the 60s. Those were post the time of Christ.

Let's put some other locations upon the map of Jerusalem. Let's look at Jerusalem as people see and understand it today. Let's take the most famous landmark – the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

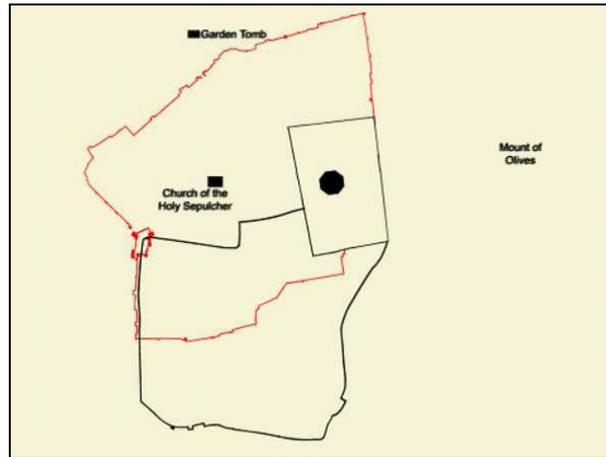


Many people think that the Church of the Holy Sepulchre is within the city, therefore it can't be the real tomb of Christ, because that was outside the gate. But the Church of the Holy Sepulchre is within the gates – ONLY if you look at Muslim Jerusalem! If you look at Jerusalem in the time of Christ, it was outside the city, as was the supposed Golgotha and the Garden Tomb, to the north of the city. Both of them are outside the gates:

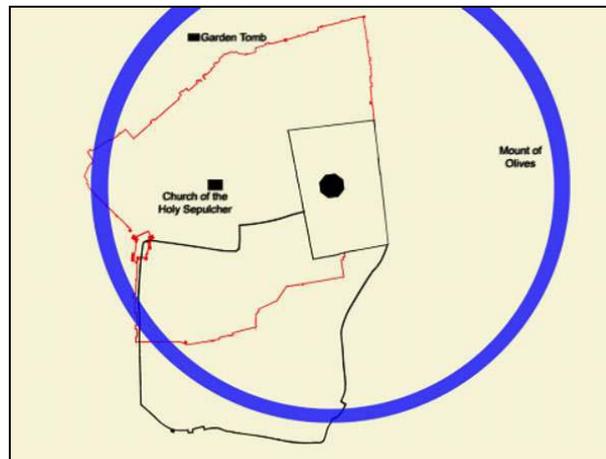


Let's do something a little different. If we put the "new" old city on – you can see that the Church of the Holy Sepulchre suddenly falls within the city (*see top of next page*). But it wasn't there before.

AN OFFERING FOR SIN



Let's now put a 2,000 cubit ring around the Temple Mount. What happens? There is no way that the Church of the Holy Sepulchre could be the death place of Christ, or the burial place of Christ. It's too close to the Temple! Nor could the traditional Golgotha or the Garden Tomb. They are too close to the Temple.



The Mount of Olives is incorporated within this 2,000 cubit radius here. Outside the camp was on the Mount of Olives. So did they take the boundary over the hill and down the other side of the Mount of Olives? No, that couldn't be, because the priest offering at that altar on the Mount of Olives could look across the Kidron Valley and see into the Temple.

In this picture, we have taken a compass and drawn a circle on a flat surface, but Jerusalem is not flat! When we go somewhere today, we don't take out a scale rule and put it between two cities on a map and say, "It's xx inches, therefore it's xxx miles" – because you have to curve around the roads, and up and over the mountains. All that adds to the distance. So we have some considerations to be mindful of.

If one looks at the topography of Jerusalem from the Temple Mount north to the Garden Tomb, walking at a reasonable uphill pace, it's basically a straight uphill walk out through the Damascus Gate to Golgotha and the Garden Tomb. There's no great undulation.

AN OFFERING FOR SIN

If anything had to be added in getting to the Garden Tomb from the Temple, more of it would be taken getting out of the Temple and down the steps from the west to the Garden Tomb, than anything would be added in terms of undulation, valleys etc. The same is even more true in terms of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. We don't have to add anything. We don't have to make any great adjustments in terms of the distance for these. Adjusting the distance is not going to suddenly put them outside the 2,000 cubit limit.

But let's look at the east of the Temple and at the Kidron Valley. This photograph is taken showing the eastern Temple wall and the side of the Kidron Valley – literally to the valley floor at the bottom of the photo:



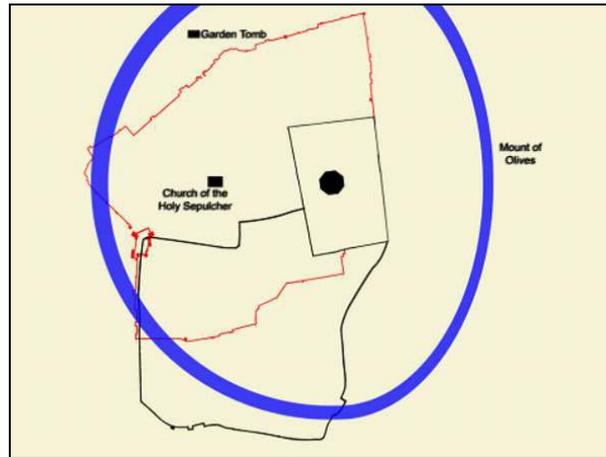
There is quite a ravine coming down into this valley and you would then have to climb up the other side, as you may be able to see in this next photograph:



... here is the south-eastern wall of the Temple. You can see how rapidly the valley falls off, literally right down into a ravine, and then climbs out the other side to the Mount of Olives.

So if you start to make some adjustments in terms of the Mount of Olives, you have to flatten the eastern side of the circle (*see top of next page*); so that suddenly, the top of the Mount of Olives becomes outside the camp!

AN OFFERING FOR SIN



Josephus records that it was something like the equivalent of 3,300 feet to the top of the Mount of Olives. But if you took the longer main camel road, which came alongside and around the head of the valley to come up to the head of the Mount of Olives, the distance was something more like 4,000 feet.

What is a cubit? It varies. I have taken it as eighteen inches, so 2,000 cubits is 3,000 feet.

Clearly the top of the Mount of Olives, whether you attacked it directly, or you went by the camel route, was outside the camp. It was further than the 2,000 cubits.

So looking at the map of Jerusalem, we start to realise that if Jesus Christ was killed, crucified and buried in accordance with the law in Jerusalem at that point in time, none of the concepts that people have in this day and age really fit! They are all ill-informed. We will come back to that in a moment.

We have talked about sin offerings. We have talked about Jesus Christ as the sin offering. How does the sin offering relate to the Passover?

Ezekiel talked about the rites and ritual of the Temple:

Ezekiel 45:21 "In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, you shall observe the Passover, a feast of seven days; unleavened bread shall be eaten.

22 "And on that day the prince shall prepare for himself and for all the people of the land a bull for a sin offering.

It talks about "that day." Only one particular day is mentioned – that is the 14th day of the month. On the day of the Passover, there was also to be offered a sin offering. A sin offering was to be offered "without the camp." It would be slain in the Temple. Its blood would be sprinkled on the altar, and then the body would be taken outside the camp and would be burned.

In the book of Hebrews, Jesus is very clearly defined as a sin offering. The epistle to the Hebrews focuses on Christ as a sin offering, and a means of the process of purification – whereby people could be cleansed of their sins.

AN OFFERING FOR SIN

Hebrews 9 is clearly set within the tabernacle, within the rites of the tabernacle. Talking of Christ, it says:

Hebrews 9:12 Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.

13 For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh,

14 how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

15 And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.

There's a lot in what Paul says here to the Hebrews. Let's pick some pieces out for the purpose of our exercise today. Consider:

Jesus Christ had to shed blood. His blood had to be shed. He entered the Most Holy Place. His sacrifice was equated with that of bulls and goats – that is, sin offerings, for the purpose of sanctification, reconciliation. And it is also associated with the ashes of a heifer – for purification, for cleansing from sin.

All of these things associated with the third altar, outside on the Mount of Olives, are associated with Jesus Christ. There is no question of that whatsoever.

Let's go back and consider some of the aspects of the gospels in terms of that.

After Jesus Christ had been crucified, and His death was near, He cried out and said, "I thirst" ...

Matthew 27:48 (New Revised Standard Version) At once one of them ran and got a sponge, filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink.

49 But the others said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him."

50 ★ Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last.

I use the New Revised Standard Version on this particular occasion because it has a footnote at the beginning of verse 50 (★), denoting that other ancient authorities record the following:

50 And another took a spear and pierced his side, and out came water and blood ...

... and as a result of that:

AN OFFERING FOR SIN

50 ... then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last.

In other words, a stab wound killed Him. His blood was shed. What is the very next thing that Matthew says?

51 Then ...

... having died as a result of that spear wound, as a result of His blood being shed:

***51 ... behold, the veil of the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom;
and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split,***

***52 and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had
fallen asleep were raised;***

***53 and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the
holy city and appeared to many.***

***54 So when the centurion and those with him, who were guarding Jesus,
saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they feared greatly,
saying, "Truly this was the Son of God!"***

My next question is, what did the centurion see? I have never experienced an earthquake, but I have seen the results of earthquakes. I have seen the way in which the land has been raised up by multiple feet, and the whole topography changed.

So very clearly, the centurion could have seen the earthquake. But if we go back to verse 54, it says:

***54 So when the centurion and those with him, who were guarding Jesus,
saw the earthquake and the things that had happened ...***

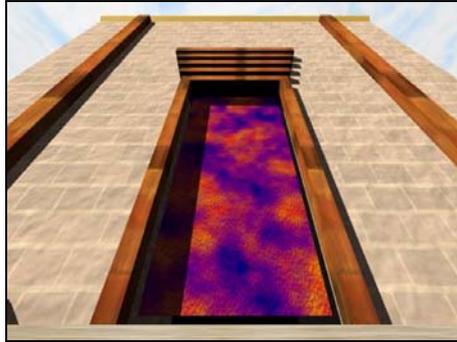
The rocks were rent. The tombs were opened. What else did he see? The very first thing that Matthew records was that the veil of the Temple was rent in twain! The only way in which the centurion could have seen the veil torn was by being close by the altar for the sin offering! There is only one juxtaposition in the whole of Jerusalem from which he could have seen that! That is clearly what Matthew intended. The centurion and those with him saw "all these things." They saw the earthquake AND the veil being rent in twain.

Matthew doesn't tell us a lot, because other reports that reputedly date back to the first century, claim that in fact the lintel over the entrance to the holy place broke, and the veil which covered the outside of the Temple collapsed!

So my question is, did the centurion see both curtains tear? Matthew was concerned about the veil between the Holy of Holies and the holy place, because of what Paul says in Hebrews 9. But for that to have happened, something would have happened to the outside veil as well. So I ask the question, did both curtains tear?

AN OFFERING FOR SIN

One of the claims that is made by people is that the writers of the gospels were very much against the Temple, and that they were talking about the destruction of the Temple. Let's have a look at the Temple:



This is a view standing at the foot of the stairs leading up to the entrance of the holy place, the external of the Temple. This is a view that a six-foot high priest would have as he went to mount the stairs to enter into the Temple, to attend to the lamps or change the shewbread. This is a view that a six-foot high High Priest would have on the Day of Atonement as he started to go up to enter into the holy place.

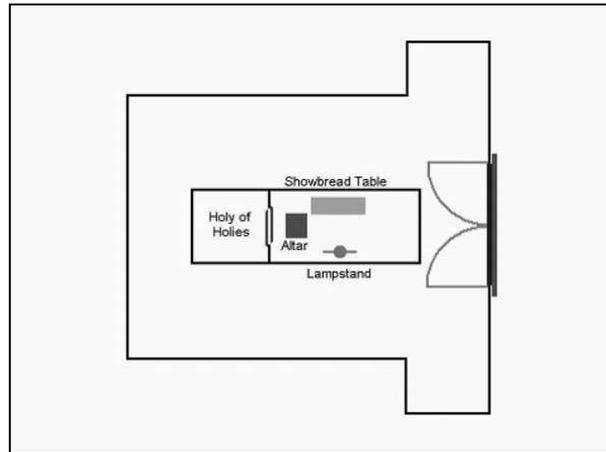
The entrance was between 70 – 80 feet tall. It was crowned by five lintels, the widest of which was over 30 cubits wide. It was quite an edifice, an imposing entrance. One of the books that relate back to the first century claims that that lintel broke and the curtain fell to the ground.



Here we can see it from a different perspective, across the altar of burnt offering, towards the entrance.

Behind that veil were two doors which opened inwards into the area between the entrance and the porch of the Temple (*see diagram at top of next page*).

AN OFFERING FOR SIN



Then there was the holy place, followed by the curtain that separated the holy place from the Holy of Holies. If you look carefully, you can see that there is a double line drawn between the holy place and the Holy of Holies. Some of the rabbis say that there was, in fact, two curtains hanging there. They could never work out which side of the dividing wall between the two the curtain should be hung from, so, to be safe, they hung two, one on each side of the wall.

They say that the High Priest came in on the left hand side, shuffled along between the two curtains, and came out on the right hand side, into the Holy of Holies.

The *Mishnah* also tells us that these curtains were not muslin or calico curtains. They were not curtains as we would find in a haberdashery store, that we could make a scissor cut into, and then tear apart. These curtains were recorded as being a man's hand-breadth in thickness! So for these to part, was no mean feat! This was a supernatural act of God!

So again I ask, what really did the centurion and those standing at the cross see? If they saw the veil rent, they saw a lot more than Matthew records for us.

In the 19th century, the Europeans started to take an interest in the Holy Land again. In 1865, the Archbishop of York formed what is known as "The Palestinian Exploration Society," which was to look at Israel in a scientific manner. They sponsored two very intrepid explorers, surveyors and proto-archaeologists, Wilson and Warren, who spent a considerable period of time in Jerusalem and in the land, mapping and recording details.

In 1869 they started a journal called the *Palestinian Exploration Quarterly*. Its first volume lasted throughout 1869 into the 1870s. In 1870, a Doctor Hutchinson from Scotland wrote about the death of Christ, pointing out some problems in terms of people's traditional understanding and challenging the readers of the quarterly to consider these things.

He followed that up with another article in the magazine in 1873, and to this date, I don't think that anybody has ever replied to him! What happened in 1874? In 1874 the publication of the discovery of the Garden Tomb was made in Europe, and

AN OFFERING FOR SIN

everybody focused upon the Garden Tomb. Nobody ever thought about what Dr Hutchinson had talked about. Everyone was very goggle eyed about the Garden Tomb. It fitted certain criteria in terms of the way in which people understood things.

In terms of the Protestants, it was an opportunity to have an equal claim to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as the Catholics, or the Orthodox. "They've got the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. We've got the Garden Tomb and Golgotha." But both of those claims were based upon a total misunderstanding of some of the criteria and regulations that existed within Jerusalem at that period of time.

Not only have they distorted the Scripture in terms of what Christ's sacrifice was about, they have forgotten the relationship that it had to the Old Testament. The Father and the Word had literally prepared for Christ's death before the foundation of the world. Before Noah was ever saved in an ark, before Abraham was ever called from Ur of the Chaldees, before Israel ever went into Egypt, before Moses was ever drawn out of the water in the Nile, the Father and the Word had prepared for this event!

What we read throughout the Old Testament is the preparation for that. It was not the work of men, whether Roman or Jewish, to kill Christ. It was God's doing; to fulfil His plan and His purpose.

In seeing human beings involved in it, people misinterpret the New Testament and say that the gospels and Christ were against the Temple.

In Matthew 23, 24 and 27 there are comments about the Temple. Jesus Christ said:

***Matthew 23:38 "See! Your house is left to you desolate;
39 "for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!'"***

He is coming back again! It was conditional. There is coming a time when they ARE going to say, "Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Eternal. We understand what it was all about now."

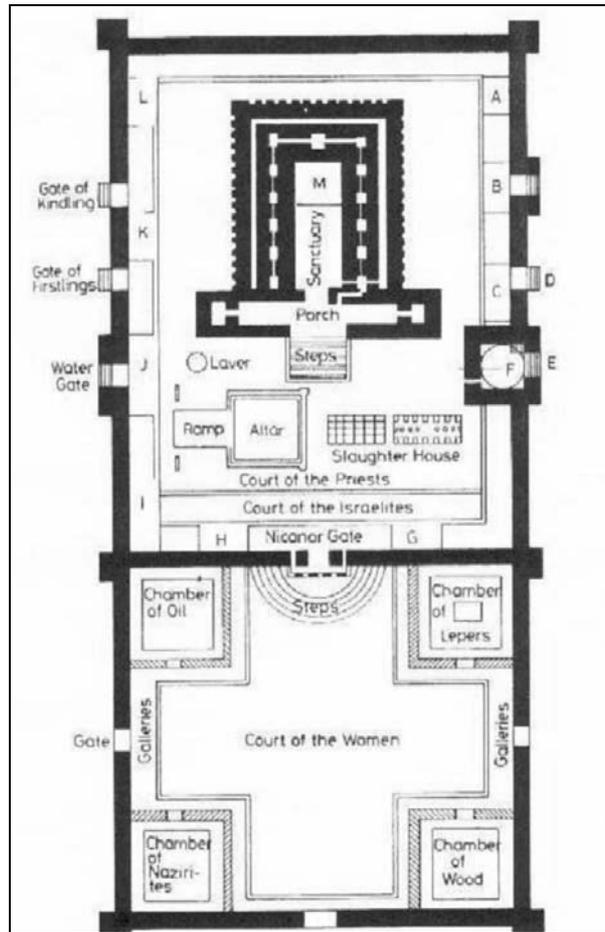
In Matthew 24, Jesus Christ talked about the destruction of the Temple. In Matthew 27, the veil of the Temple is rent in two.

But the gospels and the epistles of Paul, Peter, James, John and Jude were all written largely in the period between the death of Christ and the destruction of the Temple. There was ample opportunity, if they wanted to show that God was against the Temple, to detail things that happened in terms of the Temple, but they didn't. We have to turn to the Jews to find out what happened to the Temple in that intervening period of time of about 40 years.

Forty years before the destruction, the *Talmud Shabbath (15a)* states that the Sanhedrin went into exile. This wasn't a Babylon-ish exile, or anything of that nature. It's just the way in which it has been translated into English. They had to leave their

AN OFFERING FOR SIN

quarters and find alternative quarters in the Temple Mount. Here is a plan of the Temple:



We can see the Temple, the courts, the altar, and the place where the animals were collected. We can see the various gates of the Temple, the court of women, and the various places that were relevant to the operation of the Temple.

Down on the south-eastern side of the Temple enclosure, below the platform, was a chamber that was referred to as the “Chamber of Hewn Stone.” It is denoted by the letter (I), just below the Water Gate in the schematic above. It was in this chamber that the Sanhedrin met. It was probably from this chamber, that Jesus Christ was taken to Pilate.

Why did the Sanhedrin go into exile? Because they couldn’t use the Chamber of Hewn Stone any more. Something had happened to make it unsuitable for occupation! Maybe the earthquake had destroyed the Chamber of Hewn Stone! The Sanhedrin had to move around and find other lodgings within the Temple Mount. They went into exile from their favoured location on the Temple Mount. They had to find somewhere else to operate from. The Chamber of Hewn Stone would have been through the wall here (*see next page*), in the subterranean area below the platform of the Temple:

AN OFFERING FOR SIN



In the forty years before the Temple was destroyed, the “lot for the Eternal” on the Day of Atonement, never came up in the right hand. On the Day of Atonement, the priest had to choose a lot “for the Eternal,” and a lot “for Azazel.” The *Talmud* records that in the time of Simeon the Righteous, the lot for the Eternal ALWAYS came up in his right hand. After the death of Simeon, it alternated between the right hand and the left hand. But forty years before the destruction of the Temple, the “lot for the Eternal” NEVER came up in the right hand! That meant something to those people.

“There’s something wrong in that the lot is never coming up in the right hand!” Look at the number of occasions upon which, within the Old Testament, the “right hand” is mentioned as power and position. At which hand of God is Jesus Christ seated? At the right hand of God.

For the “lot for the Eternal” to come up in the right hand was a vindication that they were doing something right. But for it never to come up in the right hand, to many of the superstitious Jews, it was a problem.

So for forty years, the lot never came up in the right hand, nor did the crimson coloured strap become white. A crimson coloured strap was placed between the horns of the goat that was taken away into the wilderness. A crimson coloured strap was put around the neck of the goat that was to be slain as a sin offering. The strap showed where it was to be slain. They wanted to make sure that the High Priest didn’t make a mistake, because he only did this once a year, so he wasn’t necessarily the most proficient butcher in the priesthood! So they put a crimson strap around the neck of the goat, which, once the goat was killed, they then put on the entrance to the Temple.

When the goat was pushed over the cliff, according to the Jews, the crimson coloured strap turned white in accordance with:

***Isaiah 1:18 ... "Though your sins are like scarlet,
They shall be as white as snow ...***

For forty years the crimson strap never became white, nor did the western most light of the seven branches of the candelabra in the holy place shine. This was very disturbing to them because the seventh candle, the western most candle represented the Spirit of God. It represented the *Shekinah* glory. Both the *Talmud* and Josephus record that for the forty years prior to the destruction of the Temple, the western most light ceased to shine. They couldn’t do anything with it. The *Talmud* records one problem after another in the Temple, that they couldn’t resolve in that period of time.

AN OFFERING FOR SIN

When they brought the shewbread there had always been enough for the priests, but during this period of time, they called the priests “grabbers,” because they were always grabbing for somebody else’s portion of the shewbread. It seemed as though things to do with the Temple had been blighted.

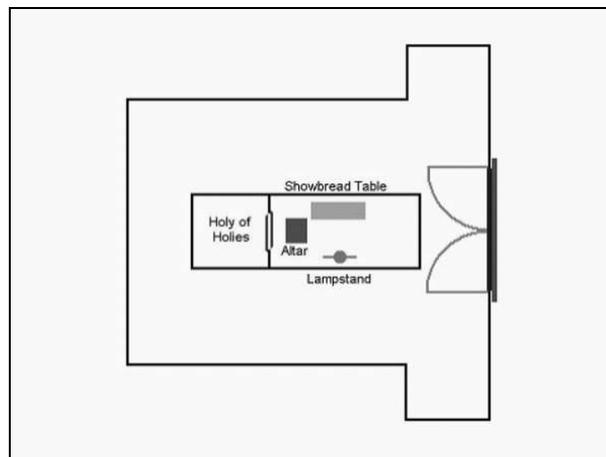
But none of these things are recorded in the New Testament. God didn’t intend for people to be against the Temple. The destruction of the Temple was not going to be man’s doing, but God’s – at the appropriate time.

For the Church, the Temple was as Jesus Christ said it should be: a place of prayer. That’s what God intended and does intend the Temple to be. One last thing to note about the forty years before the destruction of the Temple is that the doors of the *Hekal* would open by themselves!

These things are exact quotations from the *Talmud*, about the problems the rabbis themselves saw in terms of the Temple.

People could argue various ways in terms of these things and say that it was the rabbis speaking about these things, and that they were against the Sadducees and the priesthood. Many of these things did happen, and Josephus records some of them as does the *Talmud*. The New Testament records none of them.

Here are the doors of the *Hekal* which literally opened of themselves:



One of the leading rabbis after the destruction of the Temple, Rabbi Yohann Ben Zakkai talked about this being an indication of the fact that the Temple was going to be destroyed. Some of these things could be put down to the mysticism of the Jews. They could be written off in that way, but the Jews were very conscious of these things. They were very conscious of what happened in the Temple.

The Bible mentions none of this, because the purpose of the Bible was not to denigrate the Temple. The Temple was, in fact, still God’s house until He removed it, until He removed the candlestick out of the way.

AN OFFERING FOR SIN

So if the writers of the New Testament were against the Temple, there was plenty of material to use against the Temple. What was the purpose of the New Testament? Firstly, to show Jesus Christ as the perfect sacrifice for sin in accordance with the Word of God. The purpose of the New Testament is to show Jesus fulfilling the very purpose for which He had come – to be the sacrifice for sin.

We have the privilege of involving ourselves in that event, being cleansed from our sins, and having the promise of eternal life. It is not a matter of accusing other people. It's a matter of coming to understand our own personal responsibility and the fact that our sins were the sins for which Jesus Christ died. It's your sins and my sins – each and every person who has lived from Adam onwards, the sins of every human being – for which Jesus Christ came to die. It was a death of universal importance.

Returning to this aspect of “Atonement Theology,” I think you can see from some of the things that we have looked at today, that most concepts in the minds of people relating to the trial and the death of Christ, are ill-informed.

Do I have all the answers? I don't believe so. We can look and make decisions as to where things were not, based upon what is said. We can rule various things out. Some things remain as questions and we'll have to wait until the return of Jesus Christ to get those questions clarified.

But people don't base their information on sources, or if they do, it is a misinterpretation of those sources. Much has been said recently about Mel Gibson using the dreams of an 19th century mystic, rather than information given by scholars of this day and age. It may have been equally wrong, but it is interesting that he used somebody else to interpret his knowledge – in this case, an 19th century Catholic mystic. Above all else, it is not based on the right understanding of the purpose for Christ's death.

But you and I have the opportunity for understanding the basis of the death of Christ. We have the opportunity, as the apostle Paul said in Hebrews 13, of going outside the camp, to participate in that sacrifice, to take the ashes of the heifer so that we can be cleaned, so that we, in fact, can have a relationship with the Father and with His Son.

Mel Gibson does not seem to understand that. In terms of “Atonement Theology,” he talks of being “historically accurate,” yet most of those concepts that people have, relating to the trial and death of Christ are very, very, very misinformed. Why? They don't understand God's word. They don't understand the whole purpose for it. They don't understand the plan of God.

You and I are privileged to understand the plan of God, and to appreciate the death of Christ for what it really was – a sacrifice for sin for all humanity! ❖