

The Passion of the Christ!

[Note: the Hebrew name for Jesus, Yeshua, is used throughout this document.]

If 2004 A.D. is remembered for nothing else, it will surely be indelibly imprinted in our consciousness as the year when Mel Gibson's blockbuster movie, *The Passion of the Christ*, made its spectacular debut at the box office. Breaking virtually all previous attendance and monetary records for new films, *The Passion* ignited a firestorm of controversy, with charges of vast over-dramatization, inaccurate interpretation of the Biblical account, an undue emphasis on violence, and, perhaps most significantly, outright anti-Semitism. This movie, as few before it, has polarized much of the Judaic/Christian world, and has probably been unprecedented in its press coverage and promotional efforts. If *The Passion* or its creator, popular actor Mel Gibson, were to be put on trial, the case would have to be dismissed for lack of an impartial jury, so powerful has the impact of this production been in the western world.

It is quite likely that many who read this article will have seen the movie. In fact, it is often difficult to find someone who hasn't already viewed it, and indeed formed a firm opinion as to its motives, its truthfulness, and its significance. In spite of the fact that I have chosen to call this paper by the title of the movie, it will not be my intention to expound upon the merits or lack thereof of this film. They will have to be judged by the viewers for themselves. I will, however, use both the title and the focus of *The Passion*, as a springboard for discussing precisely how Yeshua (Jesus) the Messiah really did suffer for the likes of we human beings upon the earth. Unlike the movie, this study will not spend most of its space dealing with the last few hours of the Savior's life, but rather it will take a much broader and deeper look at the entire span of time that Christ spent walking among us.

In a way, it is regrettable that, like *The Passion of the Christ*, virtually all that most believers ever even think about with regard to the Messiah's suffering is

focused on those last fateful hours, or upon the crucifixion itself. Of course, it goes without saying that what He endured at that crucial time was extraordinary, and of unspeakable importance with respect to His role as our Savior, but it would do all of us immense good if we also could just as easily identify with the complete array of His sufferings on our behalf, trials and tribulations that transpired throughout His physical life, and that so fully tested, and refined, and perfected Yeshua (Jesus), not only as the Savior of mankind, but also as the faithful High Priest who, it is said, can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities (Heb. 4:15). This objective therefore is the intent and, I hope, the achievement of this particular Bible study. Please note that it was **BEFORE** His passion that the Messiah spoke the following words to His disciples:

“You are they who have continued with Me in My TEMPTATIONS (Trials)” (Lk. 22:28).

DID YESHUA HAVE TO SUFFER?

The answer to this question is simple and straightforward, as long as one understands that, in spite of the Messiah's confession that the choice was His to make, He clearly opted to follow the Father's will and lay down His life. In such a case, therefore, we can correctly surmise that indeed He did have to suffer. In other words, from His perspective, He really was compelled to give up all for the likes of we human beings upon the earth. In His economy of things, He effectively had no other genuine choice, for He plainly states:

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abides alone: but if it die, it brings forth much fruit. He that loves his life shall lose it...If any man serve Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there shall also My servant be...Now is My soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save Me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify Your name” (Jn. 12:24-27).

Yeshua (Jesus) was fully cognizant of His purpose and precisely where it would lead Him. Clearly it was not something to which He looked forward with regard to the physical experience itself, but remember that we read in Hebrews 12:

“Let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Yeshua (Jesus) the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb. 12:1-2).

I suppose that the predominant interpretation of the Messiah’s famous *passion* in the Garden of Gethsemane is that, as the crucifixion drew ever nearer, Yeshua’s fear of suffering death increased to the point that He prayed to be delivered, even sweating great drops of blood, so stressful was the situation. If this understanding is correct, do you not find it to be in contradiction of His own words in John 12:27, which we just read? The fact is that what transpired in Gethsemane was not our Savior attempting to escape His own physical death, but rather His confrontation with the horror of something far more significant, far more compelling, far more frightening—from which He did indeed pray to be spared. This is why He was in such a great torment.

How can we know that this is the correct way to view the so-called *passion of Christ*? There is a passage in the book of Hebrews that is often overlooked in its significance regarding this very question. Notice the following statement about what transpired in the Garden that fateful night:

“Christ...who in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save Him from DEATH, and was heard in that He feared; though He were a Son, yet learned He submission by the things which He suffered; and being made perfect, He became the author of eternal salvation unto all that obey Him” (Heb. 5:7-9).

Note carefully that Yeshua’s (Jesus) plea was to the One who could save

Him from death. Which death would that be? When it is stated that His fervent prayer was heard by the Father, the clear and obvious implication is that indeed He was delivered—but delivered from what? Physical death? Hardly, since we know that He died in the flesh. The Messiah was surely saved in the Garden of Gethsemane, but it was not from the crucifixion, which, for the joy set before Him, He endured, but from another kind of death, the kind that when faced causes one to sweat great drops of blood (Lk. 22:44), the kind that troubles the soul (Mk. 14:34) and when confronted elicits horror and dread, the kind that requires an angel from heaven for strength (Lk. 22:43), indeed that death from which the Scriptures state there is no salvation, and yet from which Christ Himself beseeched His Father to be delivered. It is certain that our Savior came face-to-face with the most horrible reality possible—the infamous **SECOND DEATH** - the ultimate penalty for unrepented sin!

Yeshua (Jesus) absolutely **HAD** to suffer—otherwise we have no Savior. The more one reads the New Testament record, the more aware one becomes of just how momentous an occasion Gethsemane really was in the life experience of our Savior. The fact that an angel was dispatched to personally strengthen Him during this ordeal immediately tells us the profound seriousness of what Christ was facing at this time. It would appear that the angel, in all probability, saved Him from dying in the Garden, which, had this transpired, would have run counter to the purposes of the Almighty.

We find another part of this story in the 12th chapter of Hebrews, a short portion of which we have already quoted. Note the whole passage, but particularly the last verse:

“Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses (the great paragons of faith listed in chapter 11), let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which does so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Yeshua (Jesus) the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of

God. For CONSIDER HIM that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest you be wearied and faint in your minds. You have not yet RESISTED UNTO BLOOD, striving AGAINST SIN" (Heb. 12:1-4).

This short passage tells us a lot, and gives us advice that is priceless for the difficult calling we have received. It is in verse 4, however, that we read the statement that is so pertinent to this current discussion, when it is said that we believers "**have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.**" The obvious meaning here is that the Messiah did indeed strive against sin, resisting even unto blood.

Now consider the significance of such information. We know for certain that this passage could well have applied and almost certainly did apply to the entirety of Yeshua's (Jesus) life, since He was found to be utterly without sin. The resisting unto blood, however, is more likely to be specific to that critical period of time at the end of His physical life, that time when He was in the Garden of Gethsemane, where it is said that He was in such a torment that He sweat, as it were, great drops of blood.

You will notice that Hebrews 12:4 connects His resisting unto blood with His striving against sin. What sin could He possibly have been struggling with while in Gethsemane? First of all, it was something so powerful that His opposition to it produced a near apoplectic condition in His physical body. Referring back to my earlier conjecture that the Messiah indeed faced, not only death in the flesh, but what the Bible terms the *second death*, I would submit to you that the Hebrews 12 reference works perfectly well with such a conclusion. The sin, therefore, with which Yeshua dealt in the Garden of Gethsemane was almost surely that of giving in or giving up, and going against His Father's will, refusing to confront the ultimate penalty for the sin of mankind which He was taking upon Himself. Remember that the Messiah was a human being. He came in the flesh. What He experienced in the Garden was something utterly new and different from any past or present reality. Even though His Father had established the second death, Yeshua had never had to face and bear up under the overwhelming presence and power of

such an unthinkable circumstance. This is precisely why He prayed with such fervency, literally begging that this cup be removed from Him. This is exactly the reason He prayed such an extreme prayer not once, not twice, but three times, before yielding fully to what was transpiring.

Man, because he is flesh, is almost always far more inclined to appreciate the things of the flesh, and thus it is not strange or surprising that, in the case of the Savior, we focus exclusively on His physical sufferings, while overlooking the far more profound spiritual aspect involved. What Yeshua did for us required Him to indeed endure pain, shame, and physical death on the cross, but, of course, He knew better than anyone around Him that He would be resurrected to life evermore (Remember, **“For the joy that was set before Him, He endured the cross” [Heb. 12:2]**). Being forced to confront the unspeakable horror of the ultimate death, however, was something that brought Him absolutely no joy whatsoever, nor was He able to endure it alone (Remember, **“And there appeared an angel unto Him from heaven, strengthening Him” [Lk. 22:43]**). The Gethsemane experience truly made the physical death of Yeshua perfect. Had He not gone through this most difficult of all possibly situations, He could not have become our Savior. This is how crucial what transpired in the Garden really was, and it is something to which each believer ought to give far more serious thought.

In addition to the foregoing information, there are several passages of Scripture that we ought to consider in this section of our discussion. Two of these are found in the book of Hebrews, and, with most people, in both cases the message we read tends to raise more questions than it answers. Notice the first instance in Hebrews 5. In reference to Yeshua (Jesus), the apostle Paul states:

“So also Christ glorified not Himself to be made a high priest; but rather He that said unto Him, You are My Son, today have I begotten You. As He says in another place, You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizadek...Though He (Messiah) were a Son, yet learned He OBEDIENCE by the things which He SUFFERED” (Heb. 5:5-6, 8).

This passage is troublesome for many believers. How is it possible that the writer of Hebrews could make such a contention with regard to our Savior? Don't we all know that He was perfect, that He had no sin, that He always obeyed His Father, and certainly would have no need of learning anything, especially with respect to obedience, and most particularly from *having* to suffer?

The fact is that, in spite of often faulty human reasoning, the Messiah not only had to suffer, but His suffering produced in Him something meaningful and substantial, something quite frankly that He could obtain, as a human being, in only this fashion. It was necessary that Yeshua go through precisely the experiences and circumstances that He encountered during His physical life. Not a one of them was irrelevant or insignificant. Every time He was challenged, every hostile individual He met, every word of criticism directed toward Him, every tear He shed, every pain He felt, every weakness He sensed, every prayer He uttered, every rejection He suffered, every attempt to discredit His reputation, every filthy lie spoken against Him, every plot to take His life—all were pertinent in preparing and perfecting Him as both Savior and High Priest.

When the Scriptures state that the Messiah “**learned obedience by the things that He suffered,**” what do they really mean? The word rendered *obedience* in Hebrews 5:8 is from the Greek term *hupakoe*, and would be best understood as *submission*. In other words, the sufferings experienced by Yeshua (Jesus) were part of the humbling process by which He consistently lowered Himself in His human form under the mighty hand of Yahweh. This is what Paul means when he says in Philippians 2:5-8:

“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God (*considered equality [agreement] with God not something to be selfishly held onto*): but...took upon Himself the form of a SERVANT, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, He HUMBLED Himself, and became OBEDIENT unto death, even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:5-8).

One of the most moving, poignant passages in all the Bible, these few

verses in Philippians 2 say so much about the kind of Savior we are privileged to have. You will note that Paul here shows us there was a process involved in the human life of the Messiah. First of all, rather than exercising great divine authority and demanding personal worship, Christ laid aside any prerogatives He might have had, and instead spoke not of Himself, but of the Father, glorified not Himself, but the Father, lowered Himself, while exalting the Father. Every person, group, or circumstance that came against Him, He received without opposition, and each such experience humbled Him more and more and more. Secondly, when it is said that He **“made Himself of no reputation,”** the Greek meaning is *to make empty*. Then we are told that He took the form of a servant, indicating further the consistent personal decrease to which He subjected Himself. And finally, when we read in verse 8 the phrase that Yeshua (Jesus) was *obedient unto death*, we can easily grasp that it means He *submitted* Himself to the ultimate humiliation, the ultimate demise—the crucifixion itself. And how was this accomplished? The very same verse gives us the answer— by *humbling* Himself, which is precisely what we have been discussing with regard to the Hebrews 5 scripture. Every single suffering that our Savior unfairly received and willingly endured humbled Him more and more.

But why should the Son of God have to humble Himself, or, put another way, what was the purpose of such an obvious process being worked out in His life? The solution is found right where it belongs—in the next words of Hebrews 5. Beginning in verse 8, which we have already quoted, and then going into verse 9, we read:

“Though He were a Son, yet learned (*to experience firsthand*) He obedience (*submission*) by the things that He suffered; and being MADE PERFECT, He became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him.”

Now it becomes more clear. The process that the Messiah underwent was one of being perfected, that is to say, *made complete, a finished product, to fulfil totally*. Yeshua (Jesus) came to this earth to become something, something very special. He permitted God to do with Him as He saw fit, because He knew His

Father had the full ability to take His life and create precisely what this world needed, indeed that very thing that was utterly indispensable to the human race.

There is a companion passage to Hebrews 5:8, and it is just a few pages back in the very same book. Notice what is said in chapter 2:10-11:

“But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that He by the grace of God should taste death for every man. For it became Him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all thing, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation PERFECT THROUGH SUFFERINGS.”

Here we have a perfectly confirmatory Scripture to Hebrews 5:8-9. In both cases, the perfecting of Yeshua (Jesus) is tied directly to the things that He suffered. In this regard, it could be said that our Savior, in many respects, went through the same kind of process we ourselves are put through in this life and calling.

At what point was the Savior fully perfected? Was it just after He had experienced His first trial or test? Was it when He successfully resisted the temptation of Satan in the wilderness? Was it perhaps when He cleansed the Temple, or made His so-called *triumphant entry* into Jerusalem, or was scourged by the Roman soldiers? The answer is none of the above! All of those events are parts of a whole, but the true perfecting was accomplished, as we read in Christ's own words:

“Go you and tell that fox (Herod), Behold, I cast out demons, and I do cures today and tomorrow, and the THIRD DAY I SHALL BE PERFECTED” (Lk. 13:32).

From the way it is worded, there could be more than one possible interpretation put forth, but this statement does appear to be a reference to the resurrection of the Messiah. If this is a correct understanding, it would certainly be

in agreement with the other passages regarding the perfecting of Christ. The process would, therefore, have continued completely through His entire human life, including all of the final events leading up to and culminating in the crucifixion and His literal death on the cross. Since He was perfected through the things that He suffered, it only makes good sense that every trial He faced would have to be included.

Once again, let me emphasize that the words *perfect* and *perfected* in these Scriptural references to Yeshua (Jesus) should be understood by the following definition: Gk. *teleioo*- *to complete or consummate, finish, fulfil, consecrate, bring to its end, become of full age, mature*. It would be incorrect and improper to conclude that the Savior started out disobedient and not fully submitted to His Father, and that by suffering He gradually learned how to finally get it right. I don't think any of us should have a problem with a line of thinking such as this.

If indeed Yeshua (Jesus) was perfected by the things which He suffered, in what way did they actually affect Him? Did they really produce some kind of change within Him? I believe that the answer is yes, they truly did. In fact, we can find the evidence that such a contention is absolutely correct in the very same 2nd chapter of Hebrews from which we quoted earlier. Continuing precisely where we left off, we read, beginning in verse 14:

“Forasmuch then as the children (we believers) are partakers of flesh and blood, He (Messiah) also Himself likewise took part of the same; that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For verily He took not on Him the nature of angels; but He took on Him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in ALL THINGS it behooved Him to be MADE LIKE UNTO HIS BRETHREN, that He might be a MERCIFUL and FAITHFUL HIGH PRIEST in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself has SUFFERED BEING TEMPTED (Gk. *peirazo* - *tested*), He is able to succor them that are tempted” (Heb. 2:14-18).

Yeshua, we must always remember, not only walked among us, but He also walked as one of us. He permitted Himself to be made like unto we human beings. He took upon Himself the nature of the seed of Abraham. He willingly subjected Himself to the trials and temptations of the flesh, of Satan, and of the system of evil controlling this world. He allowed Himself to suffer. Why? **“It behooved Him to be made like unto His brethren, THAT He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest.”**

That’s right–Yeshua (Jesus) had to suffer in order to become who He is at this very moment in time today–our compassionate High Priest in heaven. His human suffering is directly connected to His becoming that faithful advocate. Because of the bitter experience of the people and things that He faced in His life on earth, He is now able to encourage and nurture each of us in all of our sufferings.

The book of Hebrews comments further on this issue in chapter 4. Notice the clear association of Christ’s trials with His eventual role as High Priest:

“Seeing then that we have a great High Priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus (Yeshua) the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot be touched with the FEELING OF OUR INFIRMITIES; but was in ALL POINTS TEMPTED (TESTED) like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:14-16).

Note the underlined portion of this passage. The very fact that our Savior went through all the experiences of suffering and trial and temptation in His life has a specific relationship to His ability to be **“touched with the feeling of our infirmities.”** Let’s face facts–the Messiah had never before been a flesh and blood human being. He had no previous record of being subject to the weaknesses of mere men. His physical life on the earth was utterly unique for Him, and I believe the Scriptures conclusively contend that He indeed had to be made like unto us,

had to submit Himself to the temptations we face, and had to experience the pain, suffering, and sorrow that we endure, that He might fulfil the key role of High Priest on our behalf.

THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST

In this section of our discussion, we will cover some, but certainly not all, of the Messiah's various sufferings during His life and ministry upon the earth. Some of them will be easily understood, and some may be a little more difficult to accept. Please consider carefully all of the information that is present on each category of trial endured by Yeshua (Jesus). If there are doubts in your mind on any point, pursue it to the limit. Also, feel free to let us know your question, and we will do all we can to be of assistance.

1: SICKNESS

We may as well commence this portion of the study with a subject that will probably be a bit controversial for some, and that is the question of whether the Messiah ever suffered physical sickness. Of course, I realize that almost all believers the world over have been taught that Yeshua (Jesus) was never sick a day in His life. The reasoning behind such a contention has to do with the cause of illness among human beings. Since it is assumed, and wrongly so, that disease is only a product of some sort of sin, then it must be concluded that our Savior could never have been sick, since we are told that He was without sin.

First of all, the fact that someone is ill does not automatically mean that they have committed a sin, at least not a sin in God's eyes, or according to the Scriptures. Men, of course, always concoct their own ideas of right and wrong, and teach them as if they came straight from the mouth of the Almighty! To paraphrase the apostle Paul, *from such turn away!*

This notion that sickness is the certain result of sin is by no means something new. It was prevalent in the days of Yeshua as well. In a particularly

revealing episode, the error of such thinking is made perfectly clear. The account is found in John 9, and tells of a blind man's encounter with the Messiah. Beginning in verse 1, we read:

“And as Jesus passed by, He saw a man who was blind from his birth. And His disciples asked Him, saying, Master, WHO DID SIN, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus (Yeshua) answered, NEITHER has this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him. I must work the works of Him that sent Me, while it is day: the night comes when no man can work” (Jn. 9:1-4).

Note that the disciples' attitude toward sickness was the very same as most of us today. The first thing they wanted to know was who had sinned and thus brought such a tragic condition upon this man. They reasoned that it could have been the blind person himself or even his parents. In other words, they viewed sickness as a curse from God. This was the prevailing view of that time, even as it often is in ours.

The truth is that, as in this instance, illness does not at all have to involve sin. This doesn't mean that Yahweh wants us to be sick, or that certain diseases might indeed come upon us as the result of a particular sin. We all are fully capable of eating too much and thus gaining weight. Eating food to the point that one puts on weight is not necessarily a sin. We all, at one time or another, eat the wrong kinds of food, or we eat contaminated food, or we consume certain foods to which we have become allergic, or any number of other possibilities, but these are not to be classified as outright sins. There are, of course, exceptions to this rule, such as when King Uzziah sinned, and was plagued with leprosy (II Chron. 26:19).

If, as we read earlier in Hebrew 4:15, our Savior, in order to become our compassionate High Priest able to be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, was tried in **ALL POINTS** as are we, then what should be the answer to the question, *Was Christ ever sick?* The fact is that, in all probability, He indeed did suffer physical illness. Why? Was it because He sinned? Of course not. Was it

due to His eating unclean foods? Hardly, He would have always consumed only that which was kosher. No, it was something else, something tied directly to His role as our Savior.

The prophet Isaiah was inspired to write the most detailed and moving Messianic prophecy in all of Scripture. It is found in the 53rd chapter of his book, and, although many of the graphic descriptions pertain to the events surrounding the crucifixion, some of them are applicable in other ways as well. Beginning in verse one, we read:

“Who has believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: He has no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him. He is...a man of sorrows, and acquainted with GRIEF...Surely He has BORNE our griefs, and carried our sorrows, yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted” (Isa. 53:1-4).

The King James Version of this passage, while certainly adequate, is less specific than certain other translations. The English word rendered *grief* is translated from the Hebrew term *choliy*, and is defined more exactly as *disease, sickness, infirmity, weakness*. Consider these verses as they appear in *The Amplified Bible*:

“Who has believed our message of that which was revealed to us? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been disclosed? For [the Servant of God] shall grow up before Him like a tender plant, and as a root out of dry ground...He is...a Man of sorrows and PAINS, and acquainted with grief and SICKNESS...Surely He has borne our SICKNESSES and DISTRESSES...Yet we ignorantly considered Him afflicted by God [as if with leprosy].”

Reading the passage from this version places much more of an emphasis on the fact that the Messiah, though Himself utterly sinless, still suffered as a human being, not only in the barbaric cruelty of Roman scourging and crucifixion

at the end of His life, but also in many other ways, prominently among them being sorrow, bodily weakness, and sickness.

This is exactly the way *The Septuagint* translates the portion of Isaiah, saying:

“O Lord, who has believed our report, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? We brought a report as of a child before Him; he is as a root in a thirsty land...But his form was ignoble, and INFERIOR to that of the children of men; he was a man in SUFFERING, and acquainted with the bearing of SICKNESS, for his face is turned from us; he was dishonored, and not esteemed. He bears our sins, and is pained for us, yet we accounted him to be in trouble, and in suffering, and in affliction.”

Now this information probably clashes with the typical or classical idea of Yeshua (Jesus) that is presented by most churches, but we must demand of ourselves that we have a Scripturally accurate picture of our Savior, not one that is based on the notions of men. Understanding that the Messiah experienced the complete array of human sufferings throughout His entire life has altogether to do with gaining the correct perception of the Son of God. In fact, if Yeshua did not suffer sickness, which was, in His day as well as our own, undoubtedly the most common and often the most difficult trial to come upon human beings, it is impossible indeed to square such a lack of experience in this critical aspect with the Biblical record of a Savior who was tried in ALL POINTS, as are we. The fact is, however, that not only does Isaiah's remarkable Messianic prophecy gives us invaluable clues in this area of study, so does the New Testament as well, including even the very testimony of Christ Himself.

There is not a single indication in the Scriptures that the Messiah would be some kind of physical *superman*, although this false image of the Savior has been perpetuated for centuries, and even today is by far the predominant Christian perspective. So close is the association between sin and sickness that it seems virtually impossible to think of the very Son of God ever being sick a day in His life.

The plain truth from the Bible, however, is that, while some human illness certainly can result from sin, it by no means should ever be an automatic assumption that such a linkage is to be attached to all disease. Yeshua (Jesus) was evidently sick, yet totally without sin.

There is a particular incident that transpired early on in Christ's earthly ministry that sheds very revealing and convincing light on this issue. We know that Yeshua was raised in Nazareth, a village north of Jerusalem in the Galilee. He apparently commenced His actual preaching ministry in his hometown, very likely on the day of Pentecost or *Shavout*. We are told of Him in Luke 4:16:

“And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up: and, as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the SABBATH DAY, and stood up for to read. And there was delivered unto Him the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord” (Lk. 4:16-19).

Although this passage is often utilized by seventh-day observing churches as proof that the Messiah observed the Sabbath as a normal part of His life, it is interesting that the word for *Sabbath day* in the Greek is literally *Sabbath of weeks* or *day of weeks*. This is a very rare phrase, occurring only 3 times in the New Testament, the other two instances being found in Acts 13:14 and Acts 16:13, both during the ministry of the apostle Paul. It would appear from the wording that these three cases are references to the annual holyday of Pentecost, which was also known as the Feast of Weeks.

When Yeshua (Jesus) stood up to read, note that He was handed the scroll of Isaiah. Why would the synagogue officials recognize and allow Him to speak in their service? For a couple of reasons—first of all, it was customary to permit on occasion various individuals to read from the Scriptures. But perhaps more significantly, it probably indicates that the Savior's hometown neighbors not only

knew Him (He was certainly no stranger to them), but also perceived Him to be a man with a certain degree of spiritual authority. Observing the easy access granted Him by the religious leaders throughout Judea and Galilee, it is very possible that Yeshua (Jesus) was accepted as a master teacher among the Jews of that time, especially of the Pharisees, who clearly controlled the religious lives of the Jewish people. In fact, the Messiah, quite interestingly, had almost nothing to do specifically with the Sadducees, who appear to have been almost powerless in the face of Pharisaical dominance. In spite of the fact that there is no known evidence that Christ was part of any particular first-century religious sect, or that He received specific training in the Torah from the rabbis, it would seem apparent that the leadership was acutely aware of His knowledge, understanding, ability, forcefulness, courage, and authority. Remember that it was Nicodemus, a prominent member of

the Sanhedrin and a Pharisee, who openly confessed to Yeshua (Jesus):

“Rabbi (a Jewish term given to those who are recognized teachers), we (who? The Pharisees? The entire Council?) KNOW that You are a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that You do, except God be with him” (Jn. 3:2).

In addition, we know of a certainty that the Jewish leaders feared the Savior, were jealous of Him, and saw Him as a major threat to their power and control of the common people. The fact is, however, with respect to our discussion, that the residents of Nazareth present in the synagogue at that time undoubtedly knew Yeshua, many of them almost surely from the time He was a mere youth.

This particular episode in Luke 4 is really a most informative portion of Scripture. When the Messiah picks up the scroll of Isaiah, He begins to read in what we now refer to as the 61st chapter of the book. Why do you suppose He chose this specific passage? First of all, He knew that the ancient prophet's words were descriptive of Himself and the mission upon which He had been sent, and He intended to establish this fact in the minds of the people assembled there.

Secondly, the message itself, though consisting of only a relatively few words, is unequivocally a Pentecost/Jubilee passage of Scripture. Since these two holy occasions, one coming annually and the other transpiring every 50 years, are actually very closely related, in the fact that they both had to be counted, that the number of the count was the same, and that the overall themes are very similar, it is not surprising at all that Isaiah 61:1-2 should be read on the day of *Shavout* or Pentecost. In the first century, it is quite feasible that this passage might have been the traditional *haftorah* reading for this holyday.

When the people heard Yeshua (Jesus) directly apply the words of the prophet Isaiah to Himself, claiming that they were being fulfilled before their very eyes and ears, they gasped in amazement that such glorious speech should come from such a common everyday man. They were absolutely astonished, in fact, and verbally questioned the rabbis, asking:

“Is this man not the son of Joseph?” (Lk. 4:22).

In other words, these people to whom He spoke that day knew Him. He was the son of Joseph the carpenter. They had seen Him grow up in their town. They had observed Him working with His father. He had at one time played with some of their children. And they literally could not believe that what they were hearing and witnessing in the synagogue was proceeding from the mouth of this young man who, in their opinion, was just a mere *local-yoke!*, as it were! How was it that he, of all people, could possibly have the audacity to say such things.

Let's face facts. The residents of Nazareth were more familiar with the Messiah than any other people on earth. And when He proceeded to speak further to them, they became absolutely aghast and full of indignation, for He, of all people, pricked their hearts with His words, and exposed them for what they really were, saying:

“Verily, I say unto you, No prophet is accepted in his own country, but I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven

was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; but unto none of them was Elijah sent, save unto Serepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow. And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Nathan the Syrian” (Lk. 4:24-27).

Now you may have noticed that I omitted a verse from this passage, and I did so intentionally, just to call particular attention to it. Not only did Yeshua (Jesus) reveal their unbelief in Him as the true Son of God and Savior of the world, but He prefaced His remarks with the following statement. These words are critical to grasping the subject we are covering. Note carefully:

“And all bear Him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth. And they said, Is not this Joseph’s son? And He said unto them, You will surely say unto Me this proverb, PHYSICIAN, HEAL YOURSELF: whatsoever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in your own country” (Lk. 4:22-23).

Notice what Yeshua (Jesus) perceived they would say to Him. He knew what they were thinking. He knew full well that the people in that synagogue, gazing in utter shock at this most unlikely specimen before them, would immediately begin to taunt Him, and say the obvious—*What do you take us for? We weren’t born yesterday! Just look at you! Do you really expect us to believe and affirm you? Why, you are sicker than the people you claim to have cured. Come on, Physician, heal yourself! Show us what you’re made of—do those mighty works right here!*

“Physician, heal yourself.” It doesn’t take an advanced degree in astrophysics to understand the meaning of this statement. The only reason the people would have thought or spoke such words was due precisely to the fact that the man standing before them that Sabbath day, that man whom they had known since His youth, that man who was making such outrageous claims about Himself, that man who was so obviously sick and weak, was trying to convince

them that He fulfilled the very prophecy of Isaiah 61, of delivering the captives, of restoring sight to the blind, and curing the sick, when He couldn't even heal Himself!

This truth goes right back to the Messianic prophecy given by Isaiah which we read earlier. Remember that the Messiah was predicted, not to be some kind of *Mr. Olympia*, to whom all the people would just naturally be drawn. On the contrary, just the opposite was to be true, for it is said in Isaiah 53:

“For he (Messiah) shall grow up before Him (Yahweh the Father) as a TENDER PLANT, and as a root out of a DRY GROUND: He has NO form or COMELINESS; and when we shall see him, there is NO BEAUTY that we should desire him” (Isa. 53:2).

Please consider the following remarks from *Jameson, Faucett & Brown - A Commentary, Critical, Experimental, and Practical*:

“He is one who is the most abject of men...He is no longer regarded as a man...*a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief*...grief—literally SICKNESS...*And we hid as it were our faces from Him*...He was...as one before whom is the covering of the face; before whom one covers the face in disgust...as a leper or one affected with a loathsome disease...Here follows the explanation of the sorrows and contempt which He endured...His being our Sin-bearer, and so suffering the penalty of our sins; which, however, the Jews did not comprehend, but thought that it was His own sin for which He suffered...They who despised Him BECAUSE of His human INFIRMITIES ought rather to have esteemed Him on account of them” (Vol. II, pp. 729-730).

This is the crux of the matter. Yeshua (Jesus) appeared before men, not as one who was physically strong, but rather one who was burdened with ailments, infirmities of the flesh carried and endured by Him on our behalf. This is what the Scripture is intending to convey when it states that **“Surely He has borne our griefs (sicknesses).”** Indeed this is precisely the weight of the Hebrew word in verse 3 that is rendered *borne* in the KJV. It means *to take upon oneself, to bear*

up under, to carry. This is not, therefore, some sort of figurative reference, but rather a very literal statement—He carried or experienced the suffering of sickness common to mankind, and did so for mankind.

Remember that the New Testament states that because Yeshua (Jesus) was tried in all points as are we, yet without sin (Heb. 4:14-16), and this produced in Him the very ability to be *touched with the feeling of our infirmities*? If you investigate the Greek wording in this passage, you will find that the phrase *be touched with* actually means *to have empathy for by experiencing the same pain, by suffering in like manner.* This, of course, only makes good sense, as it is exactly the basis of our own understanding of truly relating to another's plight. If you haven't experienced the same sort of problem, you may indeed have sympathy, but cannot fully have empathy, as is conveyed in the Hebrews 4 passage.

In addition, the word *infirmities* in verse 15 is derived from the Greek *astheneia*, and it means *sicknesses, diseases, and weaknesses.* It is the same term used, among many other places, in Luke 7:21, where we read:

“And in that same hour He (Messiah) cured many of their INFIRMITIES, and plagues, and of evil spirits; and unto man that were blind He gave sight.”

The Jews of the first century were clearly looking for the long-prophesied and promised Messiah, but their picture of who and what and how He would be was highly inaccurate. They anticipated a *super hero*, a shining knight riding a white horse, the great deliverer who would liberate them from Roman hegemony, and re-establish Israel's national sovereignty, one who would sit on the long-vacant throne of his father David. And, indeed as we know, Yeshua (Jesus) did not at all fit such a character, at least not at the time of His first advent.

The truth is that the rabbis and Torah scholars actually did know that the Messiah was to make two great appearances—a first advent at which time He would fulfil the role of Isaiah's *Suffering Servant*, and die for the sins of the people; and a second, much later, far more glorious coming that would usher in the great

future Kingdom, the time when all the glorious prophecies and promises would finally all come to pass. This knowledge, however, was seldom shared with others, and eventually it was suppressed, and when Yeshua (Jesus) came on the scene, it became painfully obvious to the learned scribes and other religious leaders that this man seemed to have the Messianic qualifications required by the Scriptures. And so instead of admitting their feelings to the people, they turned against Him in order to preserve their own personal power base. No wonder the Messiah spoke such condemnation against that generation! In this regard, I call your attention once again to the previously cited passage in John 3 regarding Nicodemus' admission to Yeshua (Jesus) that indeed both he and others of the Jewish political and religious leadership *knew* that the Savior was a teacher sent from God.

Remember that one of the chief reasons for the Messiah was that He should bear our infirmities, as well as our iniquities. In the 10th verse of Isaiah 53, we read in the King James Version:

“Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He has put Him to GRIEF.”

The late Dr. Ernest L. Martin, among other scholars, says that the real intent of the Hebrew in this passage should read, **“Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He has made Him TO BE SICK”** (*Secrets of Golgotha*, p. 334).

This is undoubtedly the intent of the verse in question. Failure or outright unwillingness among professing Christian theologians to recognize this reality has produced generation after generation of people who have an entirely erroneous concept of who and what Yeshua (Jesus) really was. The fact is that numerous Jewish scholars have known through the years that the Messiah of Israel was prophesied by Isaiah to be sickly, but they could not perceive how Yeshua (Jesus) could possibly fulfil that role, due to the near unanimous agreement among Christian religious authorities that their Savior was never sick a day in His life!

Now, for a real shocker, consider the following quotation from the Jewish

Talmud with regard to the Messiah:

“The Messiah, what is his name? The rabbis say, THE LEPROUS ONE [or] THE SICK ONE” (*Sanhedrin* 98 b).

It is paramount that we all understand and accept the fact that our Savior experienced sickness throughout His life. His appearance was one of a weak man, a burdened man, someone carrying a heavy weight upon His shoulders. Note carefully that, not only did the rabbis acknowledge that the Messiah would suffer sickness and His appearance be revolting, but virtually all of the so-called *early church fathers* (2nd-3rd centuries) testify to the very same understanding. It was not until after the time of Constantine that another version of Yeshua (Jesus) , or more accurately of Jesus, emerged, one that was quite different from the true Savior of the world.

The notion that the Messiah was rich, healthy, and attractive, accepted on one level or another by almost all seeming Christian churches, including even the Sabbath-keeping community, is literally riddled with errors. This includes as well the countenance of Yeshua (Jesus), which went from the lack of beauty and desirability in Isaiah 53 to the long-haired, fair-skinned, blue-eyed, peaceful, contemplative, effeminate picture so familiar to people the world over today. Indeed, in so many respects, the Jesus that emerged from the 4th century on was a mere shadow of the original, a twisted, distorted, inaccurate portrait, not of the true Christ, but of a composite pagan entity! And with the desecration of His true appearance and the full range of His sufferings came also a multitude of other changes—including, most significantly, alterations in the very teaching He promulgated.

To conclude this first aspect of the Messiah's life-long sufferings, it is intriguing to note that after the death sentence had been passed upon Him, His murderers were careful not to slay Him in the city of Jerusalem itself. Rather, as we read in Hebrews 13, He was taken to a different place, one that ought to have powerful significance for we believers today. Beginning in verse 10, we read:

“We have an altar from which those who serve and worship in the tabernacle have no right to eat. For when the blood of animals is brought into the sanctuary for sin, the victim’s bodies re burned OUTSIDE THE LIMITS OF THE CAMP. Therefore Jesus also suffered and died OUTSIDE THE CITY GATE in order that He might purify and consecrate the people through the shedding of His own blood. Let us then go forth [from all that would prevent us] to Him OUTSIDE THE CAMP [at Golgotha], bearing the contempt, abuse, and shame with Him. For here we have no permanent city, but we are looking for the one which is to come” (Heb. 13:1–14, *The Amplified Bible*).

Although this subject has been covered in other previous studies, it is most important for believers to realize and remember that Yeshua (Jesus) was crucified outside the city of Jerusalem, indeed outside the *city gate*. This would have been the famous *Eastern* or *Golden* gate of the Temple, *the Gate Beautiful*, where Peter and John encountered and healed the lame man (Acts 3:2). This would mean that the Messiah was led out eastward and immediately across the bridge spanning the Kidron Valley onto the slopes of the Mount of Olives, due east of Jerusalem. Such a route places the site of the crucifixion at an entirely different area than the speculative locations popularly suggested by scholars over the years.

Why was it important that Yeshua (Jesus) be sacrificed at the precise place where the crucifixion transpired? The answer should be fairly obvious. He was the fulfillment of the Old Testament sacrificial types. In Leviticus 16:27, we read:

“And the bullock for the sin offering, and the goat for the sin offering, whose blood was brought in to make atonement in the holy place, shall one carry forth OUTSIDE THE CAMP, and they shall burn in the fire their skins, and their flesh, and their dung.”

This is one of the specific passages of Scripture to which Hebrews 13:11 is referring, and it is clear that this is ultimately speaking of the Messiah. He had to be taken outside the camp, because He became a sin-offering for all people. The

divine pattern had to be followed. As Yeshua (Jesus) was led to Golgotha, *the place of the skull*, He was taken eastward, each step of the way carrying Him farther and farther away from the throne of Yahweh (typified by the Holy of holies in the Temple). Once the proper place was reached, the crucifixion occurred.

It was necessary that our Savior die at this precise spot, because it was here, on the Mount of Olives, that the *Miphkad Altar* was located. This was the place where the dead carcasses of the sacrificial animals were taken for disposal. It was also here that the famous *Red Heifer* sacrifice took place, the ashes of which were mixed with water for the purpose of purification.

In addition, this locale has another important meaning to the sacrifice of Christ, for it was here that the unclean and **SICK** among the people were taken to be separated from the remainder of the congregation of Israel, and to be cleansed. It, therefore, became known as *the place of cleansing* or simply *the clean place*. Various references to this area can be found in the Torah. How appropriate that centuries before the actual event of the crucifixion transpired, the Almighty had established a specific place where those suffering leprosy and other infectious diseases or who were unclean in other ways were to be taken. Yeshua (Jesus) fulfilled the requirements perfectly, for He was both sick and unclean, not because of His own sins, of which He had none, but because He bore the infirmities and iniquities of us all!

Before closing out this section of our study, I would like for anyone reading this who thinks or who has thought that it is a shame or a sin to be sick, or that one cannot be pleasing to God and be sick, to please reconsider such an attitude of mind. Look to the Messiah, your Savior, and ask the pertinent question, *Was Yeshua (Jesus) effective in serving and pleasing His Father, in spite of His infirmities and many sufferings?* The answer you receive concerning Him is the answer you are receiving concerning yourself, should you be in that kind of situation.

Physical sickness, while not something that Yahweh delights in, is still part

of the overall package of being human. The Scriptures, by the hand of the apostle Paul, state emphatically that:

“For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creature waits for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was MADE SUBJECT TO VANITY, not willingly, but by reason of Him who has subjected the same in hope, because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and travails in pain together until now. And not only they, but OURSELVES also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, WAITING for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our BODY” (Rom. 8:18-23).

In saying this, Paul is neither stating nor implying that physical sickness is good or bad, just that it is. It comes with the territory of being human and subject to the degeneration of the flesh. It is, of course, much better to be in good health, but rare is the person who can go through this life, especially in today's plagued world, and be totally free from any trace of illness. Sometimes this is the result of personal sin, but in many instances it is the result of deficiencies in the body that are not necessarily our own direct fault, of negative outside forces that impact each of us in this difficult age, and even of attacks on us from the adversary.

Our Father in heaven knows precisely what is transpiring among His people upon the earth. If you are suffering sickness at this time, don't ever let your pain and discomfort blind you to the fact that the Almighty has not left you or forsaken you. He is fully aware of what you are experiencing, and Yeshua (Jesus), it is said, can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities. He knows what it is like to be sick, to hurt, to be in torment, because He has been there and experienced it firsthand! Look, therefore, unto Him, that you may be strengthened in your trial.

Yahweh undeniably has the power to completely heal any and every disease of man. Nothing is too great or impossible with Him. He may heal you of

your sickness, or He may choose not to do so, for He has already stated:

“I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy” (Ex. 33:19).

He is, therefore, not only omnipotent, but also utterly sovereign, doing precisely what He wills and intends to do. In saying this, I do not in any way intend to demean His power or willingness to heal the sicknesses of His people. I cannot, however, be so remiss as to make totally false assumptions, created by mere human beings, that God is bound to do what we want or instruct Him to do! Such thinking is anathema to the Word and Spirit of Yahweh. I say this to you who, like myself, know the depths of human illness, **TRUST IN THE ETERNAL, NOT IN JUST HEALING!!** Let Him have His way with you, no matter where it leads or what it entails. You are His, bought and paid for by the priceless blood of His Son. Say with Paul:

“For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord’s. For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that He might be Lord both of the dead and living” (Rom. 14:8-9).

The mercy and grace of our Father is immeasurable and without end. He may totally heal the sickness of one of His children, and to another grant not necessarily a complete cure, but rather a deliverance, a preserving of the person’s life, and in yet another situation, may even allow one to suffer and die. There are clear and irrefutable examples of each of these three categories in the Scriptures.

If you are suffering sickness, consider the very distinct possibility that God may indeed be able to use you more effectively in your weakness or infirmity than if you were completely well and carefree. This is the very conclusion Paul was compelled to draw from his own life experience, for we read in II Corinthians 12:

“And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of

revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh...For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for you: for MY STRENGTH IS MADE PERFECT IN WEAKNESS. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the POWER OF CHRIST MAY REST UPON ME. Therefore I take pleasure in INFIRMITIES (sickness, weaknesses), in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I AM WEAK, THEN AM I STRONG" (II Cor. 12:7-10).

Consider also the distinct possibility that your sickness could be present in your life for the purpose of glorifying the Almighty. Do you suppose that God was aware that the man whom the disciples assumed was a sinner had been laying there blind for years, indeed from his very birth? Of course, He was! He saw him suffering every day of his life, but it was not until a precise moment in time that He moved on the man's behalf and healed Him through Yeshua (Jesus).

If we become sick, there are, of course, wise and prudent steps to take, not only in caring for the illness itself, but also in rebuilding the immune system, and hopefully learning not to repeat the same mistakes again. It is also perfectly fine to ask questions of ourselves, of others, of the Scriptures, and of God directly in the matter. Sometimes there can be specific determination of a spiritual problem that is involved, in which case repentance is needed. Remember the instruction of James when he says:

"Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: and the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up, and IF he has committed SINS, they shall be forgiven him. Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that you may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avail much" (Jas. 5:14-16).

James states that *if*, in the case of sickness, a sin has been committed, that it will be forgiven the repentant believer who is willing to come under the anointing. He most certainly does not say or intend to imply that sin *must* be

connected with disease. That is a patently false premise created by men. It is exceedingly telling how we humans are so greatly impressed with physical success. If a person is healthy or financially well-off, the assumption among so many Christians is that he must be right with the Creator; and conversely, those who are ill or poor or suffering in some other similar manner are surely under a divine curse! What faulty reasoning, when the Scriptures are filled to virtually overflowing with the records of God's suffering servants.

No matter what you may face in this life and calling, always remember that your Savior willingly endured human suffering and continued to be the most effective servant of God on earth and of all time! Remember what is written in the Scriptures:

“What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us...Who is he that condemns? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Messiah? Shall tribulation (affliction, trouble), or distress (calamity, anguish), or persecution, or famine (having little), or nakedness, or peril, or sword?...No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither DEATH, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Messiah Yeshua (Christ Jesus) our Lord” (Rom. 8:31, 34-35, 37-39).

POVERTY

Just as the Messiah's suffering of sickness as a human being proves to be a controversial subject involving much needless false teaching and confusion, so also is the issue of His poverty. There are many church organizations, including some of the Sabbath-keeping persuasion, who cling tenaciously to the notion that

Yeshua (Jesus) was well-to-do, even rich in this world's goods. Their reason for such teaching is quite transparent, as it always forms the basis or perhaps excuse for their own acquisition of wealth, extracted, as it is, from the membership of their churches. After all, if Jesus was rich, then surely those who are His ministers should be equally so. There is, however, only one problem with this thesis—according to the Scriptures, Yeshua (Jesus) wasn't rich, but rather poor! Many people are shocked to hear such a contention, and yet the truth of it is made perfectly clear in the New Testament.

Remember that our Savior and High Priest was tried in all major points just as are we. If indeed He went through this life basking in the physical goods of this world, how could He really know and feel the struggle of the poor? Poverty is one of the major trials in human life. It may not be present with some, but much of this world's population falls into this category.

The Bible, contrary to what the *health & wealth* televangelists falsely claim, does not condemn the poor of this world, but rather reveals God's deep sympathy and mercy toward them, and His insistence that those with more be extremely careful not to demean those in poverty, but extend the helping hand to them. Note the following provision in the Torah:

“If there be among you a poor man of one of your brethren...You shall not harden your heart, nor shut your hand from your poor brother; but you shall OPEN YOUR HAND, and shall surely lend him sufficient for his needs, in that which he wants...for the

poor shall NEVER CEASE out of the land” (Deut. 15:7-8, 11).

Throughout the Scriptures, Yahweh displays an attitude of understanding and even appreciation for the poor of His people. Through the prophet Isaiah, He warned Israel in this regard, saying:

“Woe unto them that decree unrighteous decrees, and that write grievousness

which they have prescribed; to turn aside the needy from judgment, and to take away the right of the poor of My people” (Isa. 10:1-2).

Adam and Eve, and their children were the first poor human beings in history. After the expulsion from the Garden, they had to scratch a living from the ground, amidst the thorns and thistles it so generously produced. Moses, though raised among the treasures of Egypt, gave it all up in order to identify with his enslaved native people, for we read in Hebrews 11:

“By faith, Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; choosing rather to SUFFER AFFLICTION with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the REPROACH OF CHRIST greater riches than the TREASURES OF EGYPT” (Heb. 11:24-26).

When Gideon was called to deliver Israel from Amalekites and Midianites, note how he responded:

“O my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? Behold, my family is POOR in Manasseh, and I AM THE LEAST in my father’s house” (Jud. 1:25).

In choosing Gideon to lead Israel, God was following a principle perhaps best stated by the apostle Paul. In discussing his own *thorn in the flesh*, he relates the following:

“And He (God) said to me, My grace is sufficient for you; for MY STRENGTH IS MADE PERFECT IN WEAKNESS. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities (*sicknesses*), in reproaches (*rejection, hostility, hatred*), in NECESSITIES (POVERTY), in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake; for when I am WEAK, then am I STRONG” (II Cor. 12:9-10).

Through the Psalms and the Prophets, the Father makes it crystal clear that He does not look down upon the poor. We read in Psalms 74:

“Forget not the congregation of Your POOR forever...O let not the oppressed return ashamed; let the POOR AND NEEDY praise Your name” (Psa. 74:14, 21).

Speaking through the prophet Isaiah with regard to Israel’s ultimate deliverance, it is written:

“For the Lord shall have mercy on Jacob, and will yet choose Israel...Yahweh has found Zion, and the POOR OF HIS PEOPLE shall trust in it” (Isa. 14:1, 32).

“And in that day shall the deaf hear the words of the Book, and eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity...and the POOR among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel” (Isa. 29:18-19).

Writing about the city of Jerusalem at that critical time of future deliverance, Zechariah was inspired to say:

“I will also leave in the midst of you an AFFLICTED AND POOR PEOPLE, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord” (Zech. 3:12).

It is sad that there are believers who have come to the wholly erroneous conclusion that material wealth is a key indicator that one is pleasing to God. This flies squarely in the face of what is revealed in the Scriptures. David writes convincingly in this regard in Psalms 37:

“Do not fret because of evildoers...for they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb. Trust in the Lord (Yahweh), and do good...Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him: do not fret because of him who prospers in his way...for evildoers shall be cut off, but those that wait upon the Lord, they shall inherit the earth...The wicked have drawn out the sword, and have bent their bow, to cast down the poor and needy...A little that a righteous man has is better than the riches of many wicked” (Psa. 37:1-2, 7, 9, 14, 16).

The acquisition of physical things of this world is emphatically not the yardstick by which one should measure his closeness to the Almighty and the success of his spiritual life. Many, perhaps even most, of the outstanding righteous men and women in the Bible were not rich, and indeed suffered poverty and deprivation, sometimes in the extreme. God looks on the inside of the cup, not the highly polished outer facade that may glitter like gold.

40 days after Yeshua was born, His parents, being Torah-observant Jews, took Him to the Temple, as required in the Law. Luke tells us:

“When the time of their purification according to the law of Moses had been completed, Joseph and Mary took Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, ‘Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord’), and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord, ‘ A PAIR OF DOVES OR TWO YOUNG PIGEONS’” (Lk. 2:22-24).

You might ask what a couple of birds would have to do with this issue, but this fact is quite telling in this situation, for we read in the Law itself the specific reason for offering either doves or pigeons on such an occasion as this. It is found in Leviticus 12 as follows:

“These are the regulations for the woman who gives birth to a boy or a girl. IF SHE CANNOT AFFORD A LAMB, she is to bring TWO DOVES OR TWO YOUNG PIGEONS; one for a burnt offering, and one for a sin offering” (Lev. 12:7-8).

Mary and Joseph were in Bethlehem most likely to keep the annual fall Feast of Tabernacles. This is the primary reason for there being no rooms available upon their arrival. This event also coincided with a special taxation levied by the Roman emperor Octavian (Caesar Augustus) requiring all males to register in the city of their ancestry. After the days of her purification, Yeshua's parents took Him to Jerusalem, and, taking advantage of the provision in the Law specifically for the poor, they sacrificed two turtledoves for their offering unto the

Eternal.

Many people do not take notice of this occurrence, but it gives us a strong indication that Joseph and Mary were certainly not rich by any means, and the likelihood is that Yeshua (Jesus) was raised in modest surroundings. Indeed poverty in first-century Galilee was fairly common. Political oppression from Rome, from the Herods, and from the Jewish leadership, made life far less than optimum. Interestingly, Joseph is not mentioned again in the Bible after the episode at the Temple when Yeshua (Jesus) was 12 years of age. It is generally presumed that He died at some point shortly after this time, and, if so, then our Savior, as the eldest son, would have had to assume responsibility for the entire family (his mother, 4 brothers, and at least 2 sisters). There are legends with respect to Joseph of Arimathea possibly having been related to the family of Yeshua, but this cannot be substantiated from the Scriptures, nor from truly dependable historical sources as well.

I do not mean to state or imply that our Savior was a homeless beggar. Of course not, but the facts seem to support the notion that His immediate family was by no means wealthy, and indeed appears to have been fairly poor. Nazareth was a very small village, and Joseph would have almost surely worked not only in wood, but also stone. It was hard work, extremely time-consuming, and not always all that financially rewarding.

Regardless of the precise economic status of His family during His formative years, once Yeshua (Jesus) commenced His ministry, there is little reason to even suspect that He showed signs of great prosperity. It is crystal clear that He lived a very simple, disciplined, frugal lifestyle, without the frills and extravagances and trappings of great wealth. On one particular occasion, He was confronted by a certain scribe who declared: **“Master, I will follow you wherever You go” (Matt. 8:19)**. The Messiah looked at this eager, zealous man, and responded in a very curious manner, saying:

“The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have their nests, but the Son of man has NOT WHERE TO LAY HIS HEAD” (Matt. 8:20).

Interestingly, rather than encouraging the inquiring would-be disciple, Christ, in essence, seems to have discouraged him, emphasizing how difficult life as a follower would be. It was no bed of roses. It involved sacrifice, indeed, even deprivation at times.

During the ministry of Paul, he writes the Corinthians, urging them to be more beneficent toward their poorer brethren, by saying the following:

“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that He was rich, yet for your sakes, HE BECAME POOR, that you through HIS POVERTY might be rich” (II Cor. 8:9).

None of this information is intended to demean those who are rich, for there is no sin in having wealth, unless it is wrongly attained, wrong used, or permitted to produce wrong results in the person's life. The Messiah did not walk the earth as a rich man, neither does He seem to evidence the typical human preoccupation with the physical things of this life. His focus was entirely upon the things of the Spirit, and the completion of the work for which He came in the first place. He was tempted and tried in all major areas, just like the rest of His brothers and sisters in the faith. He emptied Himself, the Scriptures teach, becoming physically poor, that we might become spiritually rich.

HATRED & REJECTION

It is probably somewhat difficult for most of us to identify with how the rejection of Yeshua actually impacted Him as a person. Now, of course, we know how it affects us. We absolutely do not like it, and are greatly hurt when it occurs. Thinking about the Messiah, however, is different. After all, He was the Son of God.

Did He really need to feel accepted like we do? In addition, He knew He would be rejected, so obviously when it actually happened, He could not have possibly been stunned by the way things went.

Such thinking, however, omits a most important aspect of our Savior—He was human, and human beings are created with the innate desire to be accepted. In this regard, it is highly unlikely that Yeshua (Jesus) was any different than we are today. And rejected He was, of that there can be absolutely no doubt.

It is sometimes difficult to realize that Yeshua (Jesus) was a literal human being, formed of the seed of Abraham, made like unto His brethren, the Scriptures state. In other words, He walked among us as one of us. That being said, is it therefore possible that He actually felt lonely at times, abandoned at times, misunderstood at times? I would think the answers to such questions are obvious. Just ask yourself if you have ever felt this way, and then you will know that, of course, so did He!

It seems that everywhere the Messiah went during His earthly ministry, He faced rejection by someone or some group. Such a reaction came with the territory, as it were, of the divinely empowered role He was to play. This is, of course, precisely why we read in Isaiah 53:

“For he (the Suffering Servant/Yeshua/Jesus) shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he has no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men” (Isa. 53:2-3).

This passage refers not only to the Messiah's rejection in the sense that many reacted to Him with abhorrence or repulsion, due perhaps to His appearance or physical condition, but also to the hatred with which He was treated, hatred of His message, hatred of His claims, hatred of His powerful revelations of truth, hatred of His uncompromising and fearless exposure of evil, especially among the ruling elite of the Jewish political/religious hierarchy who,

though they relentlessly pursued Him, were consistently met with His superior spiritual abilities to withstand them to the face.

It is clear that Yeshua did not come to this earth to curry favor with others, or to be a popular figure. He plainly stated:

“Think not that I am come to send peace on the earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword” (Matt. 10:34).

His was not a calling to a comfortable, routine, laid-back life of ease and pleasure—indeed the very kind of existence most human beings desire and seek after. The degree of difficulty that He faced is impossible to calculate, and the result, at least in the short term, produced at best uneasiness and tension between Himself and others, and at worst unbridled hatred and rejection.

The apostle John wrote in the first chapter of his gospel account the following statement concerning our Savior:

“In Him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shone in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not...He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. He came unto His own, and His own received Him not” (Jn. 1:10-11).

Why should this man of such obvious goodness, kindness, meekness, knowledge, understanding, wisdom, and spiritual power, be hated and rejected of men? Let’s be frank about this question. Just because someone has any or all of these positive virtues, does not mean they will automatically be despised or opposed. What got the Messiah in trouble was not just His wonderful attributes, but His unflinching resolve to speak the truth, and do so powerfully, completely, and often bluntly. He was the light, and He came piercing the darkness of this world. His light uncovered the hidden things, and this would be His undoing, for Yeshua (Jesus) Himself stated:

“And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved

darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that does evil hates the light, neither comes to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd (discovered). But he that does truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God" (Jn. 3:19-21).

When the chief priests and elders of the nation gathered against Him on one occasion, the Messiah told the *parable of the wicked husbandman*. When He reached the part where the son of the householder was slain, He posed a question to the Jewish officials, asking:

"When the lord therefore of the vineyard comes, what will he do unto those husbandmen? They said unto Him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons. Jesus says unto them, Did you never read in the Scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes?" (Matt. 21:40-42).

Yeshua's reference to the rejected *stone* was, of course, to Himself, as we find later confirmed in Acts 4:10-11 and I Peter 2:6-8. The *builders*, on the other hand, were not the common people, but rather those who ruled over and controlled the people. These were they who primarily despised and rejected the Savior, and who come in for the harshest criticism and condemnation.

Most human beings who are despised and/or rejected are usually, though not always, deserving of the treatment they receive. In the case of Yeshua (Jesus), however, this general truth does not apply. He was a perfect man, and fully worthy of all acceptance. In the famous 69th Psalm, a moving foreshadow of the suffering Messiah to come, David writes:

"Save me, O God; for the waters are come in unto my soul. I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing: I am come into the deep waters, where the floods overflow...They that hate me WITHOUT A CAUSE are more than the hairs of my head" (Psa. 69:1-2, 4).

Perhaps it is difficult for us to adequately relate this plaintive cry to Yeshua (Jesus), but that is simply because it sounds so utterly human, and we tend not to think of Him in purely human terms. In this passage, He comes across as particularly human, filled with distress, sadness, and even a certain desperation. He is pleading with His Father for the kind of comfort and deliverance that no man could possibly give Him.

In John 15, we see the statement of verse 4 above quoted by the Messiah in the following context:

“If the world hate you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you...If I had not come and SPOKEN unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloak for their sin. He that hates Me hates My Father also. If I had not DONE among them the WORKS which no other man did, they had not had sin: but now they have both seen and hated both Me and My Father. But this comes to pass, that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, THEY HATED ME WITHOUT A CAUSE” (Jn. 15:18, 22-25).

There is a world of difference between someone who is hated because of His despicable deeds, and one who is innocently condemned—a difference not only in the nature of the two situations, but also in how such hatred and rejection affects the persons involved. The fact that the Messiah was hated without a cause could not fail, at least on a purely human level, but to make life miserable for Him.

Of course, it could be said that rejection by one’s enemies is to be expected, and Yeshua certainly had His share of rabid opponents. But His avowed adversaries among the Jewish religious and political powers were not the only ones who rejected Him. In fact, He clearly stated, as recorded in Luke 17:

“For as the lightning that...shines unto the other part of heaven; so shall the Son of man be in His day. But first He must suffer many things, and be rejected of THIS GENERATION” (Lk. 17:24-25).

The Messiah, John stated, came unto His own, and His own received Him not. His *own* is obviously a reference to the Jewish people among whom He was born and raised. Yeshua was hated and rejected, not only by those who perceived that He threatened their power base, but by many others as well—His fellow countrymen. We know this to be correct, because John records the following incident, which can only be viewed as one of numerous such occasions. Beginning in John 6, verse 53, we read:

“Then Jesus (Yeshua) said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except you eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, you have no life in you...These things said He in the synagogue, as He taught in Capernaum. Many therefore of His disciples, when they had heard this, said, This is a hard saying; who can hear it? When Jesus knew in Himself that His disciples murmured at it, He said unto them, Does this offend you? What and if you shall see the Son of man ascend up where He was before...For Jesus (Yeshua) knew from the beginning who they were that believed not...And He said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto Me, except it were given unto him of My Father. From that time, MANY of His DISCIPLES WENT BACK, and walked no more with Him. Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will you also go away?” (Jn. 6:53, 59-62, 64-67).

Rejection—the Messiah experienced it wherever He went and whatever He said or did. He took it in the face or in the back from supposed friend and avowed foe alike. In fact, the longer He lived upon the earth, and the more He entered into the purpose of His life, the fewer and fewer true friends He retained. He consistently lost support, disciples, and friendship, as His journey compelled Him to be more and more forthright in His speech, and more open in demonstrating precisely who He really was. Even those who at first were attracted to Him eventually ran for cover.

Since the gospel accounts are fairly brief in their treatment of the Messiah’s life (John himself admitted that, **“there re also many other things which Jesus**

(Yeshua) did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written” (Jn. 21:25), it should not be surprising that the collection of writings contains only specific selections of information, thus accounting for the relatively few examples on virtually any given issue. What we readers and students of the Scriptures are compelled to do is realize that the incidents, quotations, and descriptions recorded in the gospels provide us with only a glimpse, in so many cases, of the full picture that truly unfolded in the Messiah’s life and ministry. We, therefore, must relish the history that we do have with regard to this critical person and time, and appreciate greatly the opportunity that we are afforded to peer into the mystery.

That being said, there are thankfully a few situations in the gospels where we can draw out a sense of how deeply affected Yeshua (Jesus) really was by the hatred and rejection He faced. The fact that He was powerfully impacted by the lost, adrift, heavily burdened, misled, deceived, and controlled condition of the people is clearly revealed in several key New Testament passages, especially His comments recorded in Luke 13:34 in one of His famous laments over the city of Jerusalem and its inhabitants:

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who killed the prophets, and stoned them that are sent unto you; how often would I have gathered your children together, as a hen does gather her brood under her wings, and YOU WOULD NOT.”

As is easily discerned from this verse, the rejection of the righteous has been going on for a long, long time—in fact, from the very outset of human existence. The lament of Yeshua (Jesus) over the city of Jerusalem shows the tender and caring side of this man who, even though rejected by His own fellow countrymen, still retained such deep feelings of love and compassion toward His enemies.

A little later in Luke’s gospel account, at the time when the Messiah made His so-called *triumphal entry* into the city of Jerusalem, we read the following narrative:

“And when He was come near, even now at the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen...And when He was come near, He beheld the city, and WEPT OVER IT, saying, If you had known, even you, at least in this your day, the things which belong to your peace, but now are they hid from your eyes. For the days shall come upon you, that your enemies shall cast a trench about you, and compass you round about...and shall lay you even with the ground, and your children with you...because you knew not the time of your visitation” (Lk. 19:37, 41-44).

Rejection did deeply affect our Savior, on both the human and spiritual levels. It hurt Him inside to see the unbelief and the carnal heart of the people. He was moved to tears on this occasion, and it is a virtual certainty that this was not the only such incident in Yeshua's (Jesus) life. In fact, we know quite well of another time when He expressed profound emotional distress because the people refused to open their eyes to the great truth being shown them, and that was on the occasion of His friend Lazarus' death recorded in John 11:

“Then said Martha unto Jesus, Lord, if You had been here, my brother had not died...Jesus (Yeshua) said unto her, Your brother shall rise again. Martha said unto Him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life...And whosoever lives and believes in Me shall never die...Then when Mary was come where Yeshua (Jesus) was, and saw Him, she fell down at His feet, saying unto Him, Lord, if You had been here, my brother had not died. When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, He groaned in the spirit, and was troubled, and said, Where have you laid him? They said unto Him, Lord, come and see. JESUS (YESHUA) WEPT” (Jn. 11:21, 23-26, 32-36).

Why did the Savior shed tears on this occasion? We know it was not because Lazarus had passed away, since He had arrived on the scene precisely to raise him from the dead. Some might say that He was simply overcome with emotion due to the sadness of Mary, Martha, and the crowd gathered there, and

indeed this could have been at least part of the reason. Primarily, however, we know that Yeshua (Jesus) was troubled in the Spirit, in the recesses of His heart, for here He saw, mixed with tears and fears of overwhelming grief, the depth of unbelief that was extant, even among some of His closest and most beloved disciples.

The farther the Messiah progressed in His calling, the more difficult things became. Disciples who at one time were seemingly loyal fell by the wayside, unable to abide this would-be prophet. Rejection came to Him for many reasons—personal embarrassment and shame at being associated with such a controversial figure, or fear of the powerful religious and political enemies He had made, or perhaps outright disappointment with this man they assumed would be the promised deliverer of their nation from the yoke of Roman oppression. Whatever the cause, hatred and shunning and repulsion and renunciation hit Him like hammer blows from every side.

And the closer Yeshua (Jesus) came to that fateful hour when His great calling would culminate in His most intense suffering, the seemingly more disdained, discredited, and disowned He became. As He neared the climax of His earthly mission, His supporters dwindled down to only a precious few, and finally, in the end, even they too departed from Him. Being tied to the Savior of the world was so much easier in the beginning, but at the conclusion, when the vise-grip of evil, pain, and death tightened around Him, His disciples dropped like flies and fled for their very lives! When all was said and done, Yeshua the Messiah found Himself utterly abandoned and all alone.

In some of the most moving and poignant words ever written, David perfectly captures the essence of Christ's deeply felt pain of loneliness and helplessness in the face of overwhelming odds. First from the famous 22nd Psalm, we read:

“My God, my God, why have You FORSAKEN me? Why are You far from helping Me, and from the words of my roaring?...Our fathers trusted in You: they trusted, and You did deliver them...But I am a worm, and no man; a

REPROACH of men, and DESPISED OF THE PEOPLE. All they that see me laugh me to scorn...Be not far from me; for trouble is near; for there is NONE TO HELP" (Psa. 22:1, 4, 6-7, 11).

And next from Psalms 69, yet another of the great Messianic passages in the Bible written by King David:

"Let not them that wait on You, O Lord God of hosts, be ashamed for my sake...let not those that seek You be confounded for my sake, O God of Israel. Because for Your sake I have borne REPROACH; shame has covered my face. I am become as a STRANGER to my BRETHREN, and an ALIEN to my mother's children...Deliver me out of the mire, and let me not sink: let me be delivered from them that HATE ME, and out of the deep waters...Hide not Your face from Your servant; for I am in trouble; hear me speedily...Reproach has BROKEN MY HEART; and I am full of heaviness: and I looked for some to TAKE PITY, but there were NONE; and for COMFORTERS, but I could NOT FIND ONE. They gave me gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink" (Psa. 69:6-8, 14, 17, 20-21).

Just imagine such thoughts and words running through the mind of our Savior. "Shame has covered My face." "I am become as a stranger...and an alien." "Deliver Me from them that hate Me." "Reproach has broken My heart." And, of course, the most heart-rending cry of all—"I looked for some to take pity, but there were none; and for comforters, but I could not find one."

"**Comforters!**" The Messiah, the Son of Yahweh, King of the universe, was such a state of mind that He, of all people, wanted and needed someone to take pity on Him, someone to come and comfort Him in His time of greatest trial, but He could find no one—not one!! When things finally got too hot, everyone eventually broke their ties with Him. They simply could not then drink the cup from which He supped. One of His closest even denied He knew Him three different times, cursing and swearing like the sailor he truly was.

It is highly doubtful that any of us really know what this kind of rejection feels like. It was utter abandonment of the absolutely most horrific kind. Yeshua (Jesus) of course knew that His life had for years been heading in this direction, toward this conclusion, but it appears that the awfulness of that stark reality hit Him exceedingly hard. Almost surely, under any lesser circumstances, He would not have thought such thoughts or spoken such words, even if His personal human feelings were strong. This indeed was a situation for which no one can be fully prepared. It just simply had to be experienced–felt–and endured, and our Savior is the One upon whom such a burden fell. Let us never forget this aspect of His suffering for our sakes and the sake of the purposes and truth of the Almighty.

HUMILIATION/CHARACTER ASSASSINATION

If you are even vaguely familiar with the typical practices of the power elite in this world, you know full well just how ruthless they can be when it comes to punishing one of their own for indiscretions, mistakes, or outright rebellion, or subduing virtually any opponent. And what is the weapon most often employed by these powermongers?–**CHARACTER ASSASSINATION!** Nothing will bring about more decisively and more quickly the demise of someone than for their credibility to be undermined, their reputation sullied, their otherwise good named smeared and ruined. In fact, human beings will go to almost any extreme to both enhance, as well as defend and protect, their reputations. What other people think about us must therefore be awfully important to us.

We might be at first tempted to reason that discrediting someone, especially who is speaking the truth, is simply another negative element that comes with the territory, and, of course, to a certain extent, this is correct. However, if indeed the truth and its effective spread were truly the goal, the harm done by tarnishing the reputation of the one involved could be devastating, not only to the individual himself, but to the overall mission. This is why this evil practice is put to fruitful use over and over and over again by those who seek control over others.

Even the most perfunctory perusal of world history will reveal how so many of the mighty have fallen due to having their credibility undermined. The loss of public confidence is a virtual death knell to someone with any sort of agenda, good or bad, not to mention the personal discomfort and shame that must be borne.

With regard to the Messiah, the way we see things today haven't changed all that drastically from the way they were in first century Judea. That society had its ruling elite, its power-hungry moguls, its movers and shakers. And, like every civilization before or after, the ruling parties always seek to maintain their power, and will stop at absolutely nothing to accomplish this purpose. At the cost of everything else, the power base must be protected. It is absolutely mandatory that any threat, whether real, perceived, imagined, or even fabricated, must be countered and countered with a swiftness and deftness of execution that is final, that either defuses or eliminates the competition. All ruling power monopolies work in this fashion, whether in government, religion, business, or any other segment of society where avaricious control is present.

Should it therefore come as any surprise whatsoever that Yeshua (Jesus) was on the receiving end of such heinous treatment at the hands of those who perceived Him as their enemy? Hardly. He was, in fact, throughout His ministry *the* major target of this practice on the part of the Jewish national and religious leadership. They were unrelenting in their efforts to undermine whatever He said or did by seeking to expose Him as a fraud, or in some way to harm His credibility with the people.

The Jews of the first century were, first and foremost, under Roman hegemony. This means they were an oppressed people, even as they had been so many times previously, whether by the Babylonians, the Persians, or the Greeks, especially the Seleucids. Furthermore, they were also under the regional control of a king, or perhaps better termed, a governor or *tetrarch*. This role was fulfilled by the Herodian dynasty.

The Herods were not true Jews, but rather Idumeans, and thus descendants of the ancient patriarch Esau, making them of Edomite extraction. Antipater and his son Antipater II, the grandfather and father respectively of Herod the Great, began to insinuate themselves into the realm of influence in Jewish leadership, first as appointees of the Hasmoneans, and then, upon Pompey's occupation of Judea in 63 B.C., of the Romans. Herod the Great was at first the governor of Galilee under his father Antipater II, appointed procurator of Judea by Julius Caesar, who had defeated Pompey in 48 B. C. During the ensuing years from 47-37 B.C., Herod the Great ingratiated himself to the victorious struggling powers in Rome, and in 37 B.C. was named King of Judea by Antony, Octavius (Augustus), and the Roman Senate. Thus commenced the Herodian dynasty as we now know it.

While the various Herodian leaders generally allowed the Jews a measure of self-rule, they were a cruel, barbaric, sadistic lot, corrupting everyone and everything they touched. Herod the Great is perhaps most well known today for undertaking the ambitious project of enlarging and greatly embellishing the Second Temple in Jerusalem. Like virtually all other Herodian endeavors, this one took on the appearance of a good work, but was really an egregious perversion of the House of God.

Within the context of Judea itself and the Jews specifically, the local leadership fell to the high priest and the Sanhedrin. Unfortunately, under the damaging influence of the Herods, the Jewish political and religious officialdom became entangled in a web of corruption. The most important position in the nation, that of high priest, established anciently by Yahweh and granted in perpetuity to the house of Aaron, was, during the Herodian reign, sold to the highest bidder.

Among the Jews of the first century, there were a number of opposing parties vying for control and/or influence. Of that group, the Sadducees whose membership, though small and quite corrupt in its own right, was drawn from the monied classes, and consequently, more often than not, occupied the high priesthood. When the New Testament makes reference to the *chief priests*, the

majority of this group would most likely have been composed of Sadducees.

The Pharisees, on the other hand, though coming into existence and recognition among the Jews at about the same time historically as the Sadducees, both being a product of the Maccabean Revolt against the oppressive rule of Antiochus IV (Epiphanes), were a much larger, more diverse class, who gained favor among the common people, and thus were generally able to exercise the controlling power in Jewish national life. The Pharisees, though of purer stock and of greater theological legitimacy and significance than their Sadducean counterparts, had, by the time of Yeshua (Jesus) become quite corrupt themselves, particularly the more dominant school of Shammai, against whom the Messiah often railed during His ministry, branding them hypocrites and accusing them of making the Law of God ineffective by their multitude of additions and traditions which they had enjoined upon the general populace. Given this low state of affairs in Jewish political and religious life, it is of little wonder that Christ found Himself the target of intense opposition, persecution, and, most especially, character assassination.

The first century marked perhaps the most tumultuous period in Jewish history, culminating in the Romano/Jewish War and the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 A.D. During the years leading up to the revolt, the atmosphere was highly charged, especially in Judea and Jerusalem. Messianic hope ran quite high at this time, based primarily on the dreadful status quo under the Romans and Herodians, as well as the fact that the Jewish sages had calculated from the Scriptures that the advent of a great national deliverer was indeed very possible. Records are extant indicating the rise of several self-styled *messiahs* or *saviors*.

In spite of the oppressive conditions facing most first-century Jews, the last thing the leadership wanted was a messiah. Anyone coming on the scene with such ambitions was not generally welcome among the Pharisees and Sadducees, but the overall ineptness of these would-be deliverers really required little open opposition on the part of the Jewish rulers. The one great exception to this rule,

however, proved to be the man from Galilee.

He was clearly different, indeed unique, and it didn't take the power structure in Jerusalem very long to recognize this fact, once the true Messiah's ministry was underway—and that meant trouble, a word that we modern, easy-living, comfort-oriented folks would rather not even have in our vocabulary, and that most of us will do almost anything to avoid having to experience it. Let's face it—when you expose yourself to the line of fire, the chances are about 100% that you're going to get shot. And there was something about this man Yeshua (Jesus)—He just didn't know what it was like to run and hide while there was a war going on! He was a fighter, and the one thing fighters do is fight! So when the enemy drew their guns, you can bet they didn't have any difficulty finding this fellow in their sights.

In fact, I have discovered that, in so many instances, the major source of real trouble for the great righteous Biblical characters had everything to do with two things: 1) Openly, fully, fearlessly, and boldly speaking the truth of God; and 2) Openly, fully, fearlessly, and boldly exposing the evil and evildoers in this world. It is what got our Savior into difficulty time after time, and was the cause, in the end, for His murderous death. These same practices were responsible for the suffering and brutal deaths of numerous prophets sent by the Almighty over thousands of years of history, as well as all of the original twelve apostles, the apostle Paul, James, the brother of Yeshua (Jesus), Stephen, John the Baptist, and innumerable other righteous saints from the first century until this very day! These are they of whom the Bible states that the world is not worthy (Heb. 11:38). In the light of this great reality, I cannot help but consider how few of the Church of God believers today are willing to follow in the footsteps of the Messiah and those other great men and women who have gone on before us. It is a shame, and something that every single one of us ought to seriously address and correct in his or her personal life before the Almighty!

How is it even thinkable that we, who are so privileged with the goods of this world, who have been given so many advantages, who have been blessed

with such knowledge, and been given such opportunities, should sit on the sidelines while this world and its poor inhabitants go spiraling down into the vortex of destruction? I would ask that we all think about the times in which we live today, and compare them with the days of Elijah, the days of Jonah, the days of Jeremiah, the days of John the Baptist, the days of the apostle Paul. If we do not conclude that we are living in an era that utterly eclipses any of the past historical periods in degradation, deception, and danger, then I would submit that there is something seriously wrong with our spiritual insight! And yet, each of these great men of God put their reputations, their fortunes, and their very lives on the line to serve the purposes of Yahweh upon this earth. Some of them had to run for their lives, wandering in the wilderness and hiding in caves. Some of them were taken captive by hostile forces or wrongly imprisoned. Others were beaten or tortured by any number of gruesome methods, and some gave up their last breath of life and poured out their blood unto death.

This is the history of man's inhumanity to man, and it is the history of God's people. It is all written down in the Scriptures for our example, as Paul stated, upon whom are come the **ENDS OF THE WORLD!** Now, pray tell, when is someone going to wake up and finally realize that we are guilty of allowing our divinely-given responsibilities to go unfulfilled, simply because we would rather be safe and comfortable, than be propelled into action by the Spirit of God and experience the consequences? I know there are many who might recoil at such a question, but those with ears to hear and eyes to see must not allow nay-sayers or people who simply may not yet be ready to discourage them from fully embracing the challenge which the Scriptures present. Some of us, in fact, need to start doing this very thing **RIGHT NOW!**

Admittedly, our reputations are important to us, and having them damaged in some way is anathema, but this was not so for our Savior. Consider what is said of Him in Philippians 2:

“Let this same attitude of mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus (Messiah Yeshua)–Let Him be your example in humility–Who, although being essentially

one with God, did not think this equality was a thing to be eagerly grasped or retained; but STRIPPED HIMSELF OF ALL PRIVILEGES AND RIGHTFUL DIGNITY (*KJV - made Himself of NO REPUTATION*), so as to assume the guise of a SERVANT...And after He had appeared in human form He ABASED HIMSELF STILL FURTHER, and carried obedience to the extreme of death, even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:5-8).

These words ought to rouse us to action; they ought to incite the people of God, and become a clarion call to rally round the Captain of our salvation! Paul teaches that what the Messiah was willing to put Himself through, stripping Himself of all human dignity and privileges, and casting reputation to the wind, we ought to take on in our own lives! We, therefore, have no right to hide and watch, to wait and see. We must become good soldiers, fighting the good fight. Some are bound to ask, *But what do we do?* This is one of the major reasons we have the inspired Scriptures. The instructions and marching orders have already been given, written down, and preserved for us. We do not do anything all that different from what has been done in the past. We humble ourselves, totally commit our lives to God’s service, give up all, seek divine empowerment, and speak the Word boldly, precisely as did our forefathers in the faith, loving not our lives, even unto death! The issue is really not what we should do, but whether or not we will exercise the active faith and courage to actually do it!!

Brethren, I am not talking about purchasing a little time on a couple of radio or TV stations. The airwaves are crammed to overflowing with every form of evangelism. And, while it is possible to do such a thing honestly, and indeed do some good, it is emphatically not the way this world must be powerfully and effectively reached—indeed shaken! Positioning oneself or one’s group amid hundreds or perhaps even thousands of lookalike 30-minute televangelism programs that most people avoid like the plague is simply not going to get the job done! That task will be accomplished, however, precisely like that endeavor was achieved by the early apostles and disciples, only by the demonstration of the Holy Spirit giving boldness to the speakers of the full Word of God, and absolutely nothing else!! This is how Yeshua (Jesus) operated, how the original Twelve

operated, how the earliest disciples operated, how the apostle Paul operated, and how the early assemblies established by first church planters operated! What do we think we have today that is going to effectively replace the power of the Spirit so evident during the earlier eras of the faith?

Perhaps only a few will at this time grasp the absolute relevance of this fact, and the crying need to act. Sadly, most may well continue to fall back on well-worn rationalizations that they feel will excuse their opting not to exercise real faith, and trust the Almighty to produce in and through them the mighty works of the Spirit, and the real boldness in expressing the Word. We see clearly from the Scriptures exactly where this kind of activity leads, and, being human, we just don't want to go there! So we always have our ready-made, built-in objections handy.

Well, the Messiah rejected such an approach, and, guess what, it got Him rejected! He let go of His human rights, His human dignity, His human reputation, His human desire for comfort and security, and, guess what, He undertook the greatest ministry in the history of mankind, and did it without any of the physical advantages we prize so highly. It is high time that we all began to think this whole thing through far more seriously and far more thoroughly than we ever have before. Changes need to be made. Steps need to be taken. Movement must be generated among the rank and file of the Body of Messiah, and time is of the essence!

The Southern Baptist Convention recently held its 2004 Pastors Conference in Indianapolis, Indiana, where one lone voice was bold enough to warn the attendees to be ready to pay a steep price for preaching the gospel as it should be done. He based his message on Acts 4, where Peter and John refused when ordered by the political and religious powers to stop preaching Messiah, even after they were arrested. He told the pastors that the current culture cannot be neutral when it comes to Biblical Christianity, stating:

“It is not an option, because Biblical Christianity does not fit within the confines of our culture’s current philosophical thinking. That is why we are always going to be misrepresented, misquoted, and misunderstood in the press—

because they operate from a philosophical grid that cannot comprehend what we believe or why. So neutrality is not an option” (Quoted from *Prophecy News Watch*, p. 13).

This speaker went on to tell his audience that pastors in the United States will soon be faced with a choice, to either preach a watered-down gospel and obey the laws of man, or to preach the full gospel and risk the threat of jail, or even death! These are absolutely remarkable statements, especially coming as they are from the largest main-stream Protestant Church group in the world! And they are words of profound truth that ought to be taken to heart by all true believers everywhere.

You might wish to take note that Acts 4 is also the chapter where we read about the room being shaken when the early disciples prayed for the manifestation of the Spirit to give them boldness in speaking the Word. They actually asked God for healings, signs, and wonders to accompany their preaching, and this is precisely what they received!

How important is your reputation? How far will you go to protect it? What will you choose to do or not do in order that others will think well of you? With whom will you associate yourself so that no damage comes to your good name? What price are you willing to pay for a comfortable, secure, insulated life free from the responsibility of taking up the cross of Christ and walking where He walked? My friends, you and I have perhaps the most important choice we have ever had to make before us right now. And indeed its significance is matched only by its difficulty. In this light I cannot help but be reminded of the opening passage of Hebrews 12, where we read:

“Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which does so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, LOOKING TO JESUS (YESHUA) the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross (SUFFERED), despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For CONSIDER HIM...LEST YOU

BECOME WEARIED AND FAINT IN YOUR MINDS” (Heb. 12:1-3).

We have a job to do. It is set before us. So why look to the Messiah? Because in the job He had to do He was willing to suffer all, and endure all, and give up all. Therefore, since He has already gone on before us, setting the pace, we can know that whatever affliction we must face, He has already been there, and will take us successfully through it. When we are challenged, opposed, misunderstood, maligned, and discredited in the eyes of others, we can know that these same trials were faced by our Savior, and take heart that we faint not in our own day of adversity. Of course, if we have no job to do, then there is no suffering, and we have no need to look to Christ. But I sincerely doubt that any of us really believe that this is so.

Our Savior did not value His personal reputation as highly as we do. He knew that it was how the Father, not mere men, perceived Him that really counted. So His name was sullied; He was slandered by His enemies; His character was assassinated. Take the following as an example.

Suppose you were someone eager to do God's will and speak the truth. You are sincere, well-meaning, careful, and considerate. You conduct yourself so that you indeed you are above reproach, doing harm to no one. And then it starts—just traces at first, hardly anything more than a certain disdainful glance from someone you pass, then a sneering look in the eyes and the exchange of furtive whispers among those around you, and finally the sound of snickering and the shaking of heads in scornful laughter whenever you come around.

Slowly, but surely, you begin to sense that something is indeed amiss. Rumors are beginning to circulate, and lo and behold, they are about you. You start to hear the stories that are unfolding, and you are amazed to discover that what is being told is altogether false—an absolute lie, and that the intent is clearly to undermine your personal integrity and completely destroy your credibility.

Were this to occur in any of our lives, we can only imagine how devastating

it would be. Many of us would protest our innocence, but such attempts at rebuttal under these circumstances is seldom effective, and is usually perceived as merely a face-saving maneuver. Others of us would go into hiding, not daring to show our faces in public, hoping that perhaps it will all just blow over given enough time. And some of us would go into a deep depression, as we witness the foundation we had carefully constructed crack and crumble beneath our feet.

Well, as you know, this very kind of thing happened in the life of our Savior. Note, for instance, the situation He faced on an occasion when He was teaching in the Temple. We find the story recorded in John 8, beginning in verse 37:

“I know that you are Abraham’s seed; but you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you. I speak that which I have seen with My Father: and you do that which you have seen with your father. They answered and said unto Him, Abraham is our father. Jesus (Yeshua) said unto them, If you were Abraham’s children, you would do the works of Abraham. But now you seek to kill Me, a man that has told the truth, which I have heard of God; this did not Abraham. You do the deeds of your father. Then they said unto Him, WE BE NOT BORN OF FORNICATION; we have one Father, even God” (Jn. 8:37-41).

Hopefully the full weight of this encounter is appreciated by all of us who read it. These Jews in Jerusalem had heard the rumors. The tale had spread, and now someone had gotten up enough courage to actually say what was being whispered out loud to the Messiah’s face—in public, in the Temple. And what was that lying rumor? Why that this man Yeshua, going about the land proclaiming to be from the true God, preaching on mountain tops and teaching in the synagogues, had a major skeleton in His closet—the word was out that He was illegitimate, a bastard, someone born of fornication! In today’s jaded, immoral world, such a revelation might not be all that destructive, but in first-century Judea, it would have been the death knell for anyone seeking a public platform from which to authoritatively speak. But what if the snide remark were made by someone you either trusted or whom you perceived was your supporter? Such a situation would then bring in another factor—that of private disappointment, maybe disillusionment, possibly even a feeling of betrayal—that gnawing, uncomfortable

sort of thing you just can't keep from dwelling on.

The passage from John 8 which I just quoted began in verse 37, but the full story actually starts in verse 1 of that chapter. Yeshua (Jesus) is in the Temple teaching when the famous incident of the woman taken in adultery transpires. Afterward, He continues His comments, and we read in verse 30 that, **“as He spoke these words, many believed on Him.”** But now notice carefully the very next verse:

“Then said Jesus (Yeshua) to those JEWS WHICH BELIEVED ON HIM” (Jn. 8:31).

The dialogue then continues on through to the end of the chapter. The issue here is that the people who made the lying, insulting remark about the legitimacy of His birth were among those whom the Scriptures state believed on Him! And they didn't stop with this charge either. They had more to say about the Son of God. First we have the Savior making the following statement, then the rejoinder by the Jews:

“He that is of God hears God's words: you therefore hear them not, because you are not of God. Then answered the Jews, and said unto Him, Say we not well that You are a SAMARITAN, and HAVE A DEMON? Jesus answered, I have not a demon; but I honor My Father, and you do dishonor Me...Then said the Jews unto Him, Now we know that you have a demon...Are You greater than our father Abraham, who is dead? And the prophets are dead: WHO DO YOU MAKE YOURSELF OUT TO BE?” (Jn. 8:47-49, 52-53).

How would you like to have your own mother insulted, your own good name slandered, and then be told that you are demon possessed—in public, and by people who claim to believe in you? Not a very pleasant question, is it? But indeed one which the Messiah had to face and endure. Do you suppose that these Jews who believed in Yeshua continued to walk compatibly with Him? I would suggest that with friends like these, who needs enemies!! In fact, as we

shall soon see, these very identical people in this story not only became our Savior's enemies, but lethal ones at that!

In addition, note the last verse in the above quotation. The so-called *believing* Jews conclude their defamation of the Messiah by asking the sarcastic questions: *Just who are you making yourself out to be? We have Abraham, and we have the prophets, but who do you think you are?* The implication, of course, is that they considered both Yeshua (Jesus) and His claims as nothing more than hype, the proclamations of yet another common, self-styled messiah, not worthy of their time or consideration. As far as they were concerned, this man couldn't hold a candle to the revered Abraham, the one they perceived was their true father, nor to the prophets of old. And so, they belittled Him, and publicly excoriated Him, spreading the false gossip of a family scandal, and accusing Him of being demon-possessed!

Not only was He said to be a demoniac, but some of the Jews went even further in their condemnation of the Son of God, for in Matthew 12, we read:

“Then was brought unto Him one possessed with a demon, blind and dumb; and He healed him,

insomuch that the blind and dumb both spoke and saw. And all the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the son of David? But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow does not cast out demons, but by BEELZEBUB, THE PRINCE OF THE DEMONS” (Matt. 12:22-24).

This accusation was perhaps the most serious of all, as it was nothing short of outright blasphemy, to which the Savior responded by saying:

“Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit shall not be forgiven unto men...neither in this world, neither in the world to come” (Matt. 12:31-32).

To attribute the works of the Holy Spirit to the adversary Satan is unconscionable, a sin of the most egregious kind. And this coming from the leaders of the Jewish nation, who had banded together with the single objective of ridding themselves and the Jews of this man Yeshua. To accomplish this goal, they undertook a specifically focused, highly targeted program of disinformation, character assassination, scandal, and outright lies of the most malicious type. What we have been reading from the gospel accounts is precisely the story that was being fabricated and spread throughout Judea and Galilee by the authorities. It followed Yeshua (Jesus) wherever He traveled and whoever He met. It affected how He was perceived and accepted by the people. It cast doubt upon Him, and raised questions in the minds of others. His entire ministry was entangled in the web of untruths, half-truths, rumors, and other false information, all expressly designed to undermine His credibility. For the average person, such a campaign against them would be overwhelming and utterly destructive. It would make life miserable, possibly unbearable. Innumerable individuals in this world have been devastated and destroyed by this kind of concerted effort on the part of the power elite, and some, becoming so depressed, have even committed suicide!

The fact that lies were constantly being told about Him was something that Christ had to put up with throughout His ministry, and probably His entire lifetime. In addition, He was called every sort of foul name, from drunkard and glutton, to blasphemer, liar, bastard, Sabbath-breaker, deceiver, and sinner—not exactly one's ideal of a complimentary list!

FROM TAUNTS TO THREATS & BEYOND

It is one thing to be discounted by others, to hearing derisive comments regarding oneself, to having one's reputation sullied, but quite another when the attitude and atmosphere around you turns, not just evil, but actually threatening—indeed, life-threatening.

This is exactly what happened in the case of the Messiah.

Unless for some rare reason any of us might have actually had our lives threatened by evil outside forces, it is difficult indeed to relate to the fact that our Savior went through His entire ministry under such a cloud. And lest we make the assumption that His life was in danger only around the time of the crucifixion, note what John records quite early in the Messiah's ministry:

“Now there is at Jerusalem by the sheep market a pool...And a certain man was there, which had an infirmity thirty and eight years...Jesus said unto him, Rise, take up your bed and walk. And immediately the man was made whole...and on the same day was the Sabbath...Therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus (Yeshua), and sought to SLAY HIM...But Jesus answered them, My Father works hitherto, and I work. Therefore the Jews sought the more to KILL HIM, because He not only had broken the Sabbath, but said also that God was His Father, making Himself equal to God” (Jn. 5:2-18).

The gospel account of John, in fact, denotes several such attempts on the part of the Jewish leadership to plot and carry out the murder of Yeshua. Putting these together helps to paint a more accurate picture of what the Messiah actually faced in this regard throughout His ministry. Beginning in chapter 7, verse 1, we read:

“After these things Jesus (Yeshua) walked in Galilee: for He would not walk in Judea, because the Jews SOUGHT TO KILL HIM. Now the Jews' Feast of Tabernacles was at hand. His brothers therefore said unto Him, Depart hence, and go into Judea, that Your disciples also may see the works that You do. For there is no man that does anything in secret that does not seek to be known openly. If You do these things, show Yourself to the world. For neither did His brothers believe in Him. Then Jesus said unto them, My time is not yet come...But when His brothers were gone up, then went He also up to the feast...Now about the midst of the feast He went up into the Temple and taught...Did not Moses give you the law, and yet none of you keeps the law? Why go you about to KILL ME?...Then they sought to take Him: but no man laid hands on Him, because His hour (of death) was not yet come. And many of the people believed on Him...The Pharisees heard that the people murmured

such things concerning Him; and the Pharisees and the chief priests sent officers to take Him...Then came the officers to the chief priests and Pharisees; and they said unto them, Why have you not brought Him? The officers answered, Never a man spoke like this man” (Jn. 7).

Before proceeding, I wonder if you noticed something rather telling in the initial portion of this passage? Consider carefully the first 6 verses of John 7. Verse 1 begins with the Messiah being careful not to go into Judea, because of the death threats against Him. Yet, in spite of this fact, His own family members, who did not believe in Him anyway, urge Him to put Himself in harm’s way by going up to Jerusalem at the occasion of the Feast of Tabernacles. Yeshua replies that His time has not yet come, meaning the time of His death. Is it possible that the Savior’s own brothers, at this early point in His ministry, knowingly encouraged Him to expose Himself to those who were plotting His death? From the way John 7 reads, I would submit to you that this is precisely what they had in mind, and Yeshua was clever enough not to be taken in by their false advice.

As we move to John 8, this same thread of conspiracy against the Messiah continues. After publicly humiliating Him by insinuating that He was of illegitimate birth, and that He was demon-possessed, as we covered earlier, the chapter concludes on the following note:

“If I honor Myself, My honor is nothing: it is My Father that honors Me; of whom you say that He is your God...Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day: and he saw it, and was glad. Then said the Jews unto Him, You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham? Jesus (Yeshua) said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am. 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” (Jn. 8:54-59).

A rather telling passage in John 9 reveals how the ongoing plot to assassinate the Savior went further than just the secret collaborative efforts of the Jewish political and religious leaders. They obviously took additional steps to

ensure that this nefarious plan had the best possible chance of succeeding.

It so happens that after Yeshua (Jesus) had healed a man who was blind from birth, the Pharisees and others were informed. Since the man was extolling the One who had given him his eyesight, the elders and priests demanded to hear what his parents had to say, refusing to believe the testimony of the man himself. Note how they responded:

“His parents answered them and said, We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind: but by what means he now sees, we know not; or who has opened his eyes, we know not: he is of age; ask him: he shall speak for himself. These words spoke his parents, because they FEARED THE JEWS: for they had agreed already, that if any did confess that He was Messiah, he should be PUT OUT of the synagogue” (Jn. 9:20-22).

The instilling of fear in the common populace is one of the oldest methods of control ever utilized by evil men. It is the major reason how so much of what is actually going on in the world is able to be hidden, often in plain sight. Any number of key individuals may well be aware of certain highly questionable activities, but if they fear to expose such things, because they have been threatened in some way, then the endeavors and manipulations can continue unabated, and no one is the wiser. It is a highly effective weapon, and is in use extensively in today's deceptive world.

In chapter 10 of John's gospel, we read in verse 31 that certain of the Jews once more took up stones that they might kill Yeshua, and, again in verse 39, they attempted to take Him, but He escaped out of their hand by crossing over into the Jordan wilderness.

In John 11 we read the story of Lazarus's resurrection from the dead. As usual, there were some who believed in Yeshua (Jesus), and others who did not. In the aftermath of this great miracle, the disgruntled ones went immediately and reported it to the authorities. Beginning in verse 47, we pick up the narrative:

“Then gathered the chief priests, and the Pharisees council, and said, What must we do? For this man does many miracles. If we let Him alone, all men will believe on Him: and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and our nation. And one of them, named Caiaphas, being the high priest that same year, said unto them, You 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...Then from that day forth they took counsel together for to **PUT HIM TO DEATH**. Jesus therefore walked no more openly among the Jews; but went thence unto a country near to the wilderness, into a city called Ephraim, and there continued with His disciples” (Jn. 11:47-50, 53-54).

From this point on, the plot thickens, and the Jewish leaders consolidate their efforts to take Yeshua and slay Him. In John 11:57, we read that they gave a command that, if anyone knew where He was, they should let it be known, so He could be arrested. The remainder of the story is, of course, almost too familiar to all of us. The Savior was indeed betrayed by Judas Iscariot for money, taken into custody by a contingent of soldiers late at night, illegally tried by the Sanhedrin, found guilty through the bribed testimony of false witnesses, insulted, beaten, buffeted, scourged, and condemned to the most dreaded of all fates-- brutal death by crucifixion.

We have only covered several of the instances in the book of John where the conspiracy against the Messiah is clearly established, from the commencement of His ministry until his death on the cross. There are a number of additional incidents recorded in the other gospel accounts that add to and substantiate the great difficulty Yeshua (Jesus) labored under in the conduct of His work upon the earth. Indeed, for the Scriptures to state that He was tried in all points as are we is truly an incredible understatement! No wonder we have such a compassionate High Priest in heaven, one who has suffered as one of us, and who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities. This is why we can now come boldly before the throne of Yahweh and find grace to help in the time of need (Heb. 4:14-16).

IDENTIFYING WITH THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST

This study has been necessarily brief, especially considering the immensity of the subject involved, but hopefully it has put some of the suffering of the Messiah into a profitable perspective. He endured severe trial all of His life, not just at the end. And we haven't even touched on His many temptations—the continual need for Him to remain acutely aware, always on top of things, because there were evil men around Him constantly whose sole purpose was to lure Him into committing sin. In Hebrews 12, we read the following passage with regard to this fact:

“Let us...run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus (Yeshua) the author and finisher of our faith...For consider Him that ENDURED SUCH CONTRADICTION OF SINNERS AGAINST HIMSELF, lest you be wearied, and faint in your minds. You have not yet RESISTED UNTO BLOOD, STRIVING AGAINST SIN” (Heb. 12:1-4).

Although we all should be quite familiar with the fact of temptation in our daily lives, none of us has been put through such an experience as our Savior endured, who was throughout His ministry persistently hounded by evil people bent on His destruction, who sought at every turn to trap Him into committing sin. These efforts, in all likelihood, constituted an opponent more difficult with whom to deal than any of the other kinds of trial faced by Yeshua. And, the language of Hebrews 12:3-4 above certainly indicates that we ought to be acutely aware of our need to endure the contradiction of sinners against ourselves, and double our determination to follow in the Messiah's footsteps by resisting the temptation to sin on every occasion, and as a way of life.

We began this discussion by mentioning the highly touted Mel Gibson movie, *The Passion of the Christ*. Although coming in for its share of criticism from various sources, evangelical Christians and much of the mainstream American Protestant world has embraced this cinematic extravaganza, hailing it as an

inspired piece of work. Its focus, as you undoubtedly know, is almost exclusively on the final hours of Yeshua's (Jesus) life, and the brutality He suffered at the hands of the Jewish leaders, King Herod, and the Romans, all of which played key roles in terminating the life of the Messiah.

One comment that I have heard over and over with respect to this movie is how effective it is in helping people to identify with the sufferings of their Savior. I think we can all understand that a highly emotional story such as this, powerfully and compellingly brought to the big screen, would certainly have an impact on any believer. And, I think we would all agree that identifying with Christ's sufferings is unquestionably something to be desired. In spite of how good an attempt such as *The Passion* may be, however, the Bible reveals a very different kind of approach to our correctly relating to the trials and afflictions of Yeshua (Jesus).

If we truly desire to more closely and intimately identify ourselves with the sufferings and passion of the Christ, we really need to adopt the approach God has given us in the Scriptures. I am fully persuaded that most of we believers indeed want to be touched with the feeling of His afflictions, and I am not saying that a movie might possible achieve a degree of such sensitivity, but there is another factor that needs to be seriously considered in this entire issue.

The fact is that the Bible tells us precisely how to better identify with the sufferings of Yeshua (Jesus), but one has to wonder just how readily we are willing to accept and follow what is revealed about this subject. There is a specific pathway that will lead to this worthy objective, but it is quite different than watching a movie or reading a book, no matter how well produced they may be, or how much value one can derive from them. Here is exactly what I mean.

Beginning with the apostle Peter's first epistle, we read the following:

"Forasmuch then as Christ has suffered for us in the flesh (*This is what we have just covered*), arm yourselves LIKEWISE with the SAME MIND: for he that has SUFFERED in the flesh has ceased from sin; that he no longer should live

the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God” (I Pet. 4:1-2).

Here is given the Biblical prescription for relating to and identifying with the sufferings of Yeshua (Jesus). As I stated earlier, what Peter was inspired to say in this passage has nothing whatsoever to do with thinking that we can somehow vicariously connect with His trials and tribulations by watching a movie, no matter how well it is made or how pure its intent. Rather he gets right to the heart of the matter by telling us in no uncertain terms that just as the Messiah suffered the flesh for us, so likewise we should take our lead from Him and follow—not just read about it, but **DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT!!**

In the same 4th chapter, Peter continues on this same theme by saying:

“Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some unusual thing happened unto you: but rejoice, inasmuch as you are **PARTAKERS OF CHRIST’S SUFFERINGS**; that, when His glory shall be revealed, you may be glad also with exceeding joy. If you be reproached for Christ’s sake, happy are you; for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you” (I Pet. 4:12-14).

Note the underscored words above. The divine rule in this matter is that **TO IDENTIFY WITH THE SUFFERINGS OF THE MESSIAH, ONE MUST PARTAKE OF THOSE SUFFERINGS PERSONALLY!** This is in sharp contrast to seeking achievement of this objective in any other way or by any other means. There is only one method by which any believer truly connects with Christ’s sufferings, and that is by sharing in those sufferings, experiencing them, living them, and allowing them to perfect us even as Yeshua (Jesus) was made perfect by the trials and temptations that He endured.

Paul understood this truth with absolute clarity, and he, as much as anyone who has ever lived, fulfilled the role of a suffering servant. Writing to the Romans, he teaches:

“For you have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but you have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself bearing witness with our spirit that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ; IF SO BE THAT WE SUFFER WITH HIM, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Rom. 8:15-18).

In this passage, not only does Paul make the identical point as Peter on this subject, but he also ties our suffering with the Messiah to becoming children and heirs of God. This point deserves some careful consideration by each of us, because it is not a light statement. We must ask ourselves if Paul is contending that becoming joint-heirs with Yeshua (Jesus) is conditional, based upon our personal participation in His sufferings? This would certainly appear to be the case.

In II Corinthians 1, the apostle picks up on this same issue once again, this time in a slightly different manner, but filled with the same import as in his letter to Rome. Beginning in verse 3, we read:

“Blessed by God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted by God. For as the SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST ABOUND IN US, so our consolation also abounds by Christ. And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual (*wrought*) in the ENDURING OF THE SAME SUFFERINGS which we also suffer...And our hope of you is steadfast, knowing, that as YOU ARE PARTAKERS OF THE SUFFERINGS, so shall you be also of the consolation” (II Cor. 1:3-7).

In this passage we pick up on an additional theme. Not only does Paul

confirm Peter's teaching on this subject, even using similar language, particularly when he states **"as you are partakers of the sufferings,"** but also shows that we, like Messiah, are to become comforters of those who are in trouble. Remember that His being tried and tested in all points like as are we forms the very basis for Him becoming our compassionate High Priest in heaven who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities. So, we are expected, therefore, to follow Christ even in this regard, and our participation in His sufferings is precisely what equips us to fulfil this role in our lives.

Paul continues to press hard on this principle in his second letter to the Corinthians, writing in chapter 4 concerning himself and those serving with him:

"But God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, has shined in our hearts...But we have this (*spiritual*) treasure in (*physical*) earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us. We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair (*not altogether without help or means*); persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus (Yeshua), that the LIFE also of JESUS might be MADE MANIFEST in our body. For we which live are always delivered unto DEATH FOR JESUS' SAKE" (II Cor. 4:6-11).

What a marvelous passage of Scripture and what a perfect attitude of heart toward a very difficult and challenging part of the divine calling we have received. Note carefully that Paul not only makes the same point once again that we, as believers, are to participate in the sufferings of our Savior, but that the manifestation of His life in ours is based upon that very participation. In other words, as we willingly share in Yeshua's (Jesus) sufferings, so He is able to be formed within us. Paul goes on to say:

"For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God. For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day

by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, works for us a far more exceeding weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal” (II Cor. 4:15-18).

Have you noticed that in each of these various Biblical passages on participating in Christ’s sufferings, something of great spiritual significance in our personal lives is involved, and indeed attached to such participation? Notice these facts:

1. “For he that has SUFFERED in the flesh has ceased from sin” (I Pet. 4:2)
2. “When His glory shall be revealed, you may be glad also with exceeding joy. If you be reproached for Christ’s sake, happy are you; for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you” (I Pet. 4:12-14).
3. “Joint-heirs with Christ; IF SO BE THAT WE SUFFER WITH HIM, that we may be also glorified together” (Rom. 8:17).
4. “For as the SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST ABOUND IN US, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual (*wrought*) in the ENDURING OF THE SAME SUFFERINGS which we also suffer” (II Cor. 1:5-6).
5. “Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus (Yeshua), that the LIFE also of JESUS might be MADE MANIFEST in our body” (II Cor. 4:10).

Ceasing from sin, the Spirit of glory and of God resting upon us, becoming joint-heirs with Messiah, being glorified together, the receiving of divine consolation and salvation, the manifestation of Yeshua (Jesus) within us—What an incredible list! These blessings are directly connected with our willingness to experience the sufferings of Christ. And it is in this way, and this way only, that we are truly able to identify with the suffering of our Savior. Note carefully the attitude and subsequent quest of Paul in this regard:

“But what things were gain to me, those I counted LOSS (*giving them up, sacrificing them*) for Christ. Yea doubtless, I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus (Yeshua) my Lord: for Whom I have SUFFERED the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, THAT I MAY WIN CHRIST, and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: THAT I MAY KNOW HIM, and the POWER of His RESURRECTION, and the FELLOWSHIP (*relationship, connection, identification*) of HIS SUFFERINGS, being made conformable unto His death; if by any means I might ATTAIN unto the RESURRECTION of the dead” (Phil. 3:7-11).

This is how Paul related to the sufferings of Yeshua. This is how he identified with his Savior—not by being an *armchair, sideline participant*, but rather by suffering the loss of all things. Remember that Paul didn’t have movie to draw him into closer and more intimate contact with the Messiah, to come to understand better how He suffered in all points as do we. He learned that in an entirely different way—by suffering with Christ and for Him, and doing so not according to man’s ideas of what constitutes true Godly suffering, but rather precisely what the Scriptures reveal in this regard! Human suffering comes in all forms and fashions, some of it is truly righteous affliction, most of it is simply that which is brought upon ourselves for other reasons.

In his letter to the Colossians, Paul unveils yet another very important aspect of our participating in the sufferings of the Messiah. In chapter 1, we read:

“Even now I rejoice in the midst of my sufferings on your behalf. And in my own person I am making up whatever is still lacking and remains to be completed [on our part] of Christ’s afflictions, for the sake of His Body, which is the Church” (Col. 1:24, *The Amplified Bible*).

This verse contains a statement that is not all that easy to grasp. In the King James Version it simply reads: “**And fill up that which is behind of the afflictions**

of Christ in my flesh for His Body's sake.” As you can see above, *The Amplified Bible* expands on this passage and succeeds in making it somewhat more comprehensible, but still a further explanation is needed.

When Paul speaks of what remains of the Messiah's sufferings, he is not referring to any such deficiency with regard to Yeshua's (Jesus) meritorious suffering for the sins of mankind, since this was completely fulfilled by the Savior Himself. Nothing whatsoever, therefore, in this respect is lacking. The Church (Gk. *Ekklesia* - congregation, assembly, synagogue), however, constitutes the Body of Christ upon the earth. As such, He inhabits that Body, and therefore suffers as we members of the Body so suffer. He is thus destined to experience and endure certain afflictions in His spiritual Body, as well as His actual human frame when He walked the earth as a man. Paul is, therefore, referring to these sufferings of Christ in this Colossians passage. Those sufferings are still in the process of being fulfilled. Paul states that every time he personally suffers for the sake of Yeshua (Jesus), he is helping to fill up what yet remains of Christ's sufferings through the Body of believers. Such a contention on the part of the apostle Paul is absolutely revolutionary, in that it gives us a perspective on this point found nowhere else in Scripture, and is clearly indicative of the inexpressibly intimate relationship between those who truly suffer for the Messiah's sake and the Messiah Himself. If we can but pick up on this point, it has the potential of literally transforming our very attitude toward righteous affliction.

Finally, let us consider Paul's last letter, that of II Timothy. This epistle, though short, is crammed full of very important teaching for all of us, especially when we realize that Paul was about to be put to death, and he knew it, and thus his writing to Timothy constitutes the last words of advice that Paul can share. Dwell on the following words in II Timothy 2:

“Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel (*the good news that I preach*): wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound. Therefore I

endure all things for the elect's sake, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. It is a faithful saying: For IF WE be DEAD with HIM, WE shall also LIVE with Him: IF WE SUFFER, we shall also REIGN WITH HIM: if we deny Him, He will also deny us" (II Tim. 2:8-12).

If we are dead with Him, we shall live with Him; if we suffer as He suffered, we shall also reign with Him. What beautiful and powerful teaching on a subject so sensitive and so difficult to effectively communicate to others.

As we allow ourselves to suffer for Yeshua (Jesus), we come into a deeper relationship with Him and with His sufferings on our behalf. When I say *allow ourselves to suffer*, I mean that we willingly say and do the things which brought trial and affliction upon our Savior. Had He hidden Himself away, kept His mouth shut, and simply refused to openly show forth the powerful manifestation of the Spirit, He would have never experienced the degree of suffering He endured. Speaking the words and doing the works of the Messiah are the means by which such righteous suffering is brought on.

If we intend to genuinely identify with the adversity and grief of our Savior, then we must be willing to take up the challenge that He offers to us to participate in His agony and in His passion. Considering the significance of what the Word of God attaches to our partaking of Yeshua's (Jesus) sufferings, we all should be compelled to fearlessly grasp such an opportunity to follow Him.

Although perhaps far more rare than we would like, the fact that we 21st centuries believers have access to such modern innovations as movies can be used for good, and sometimes actually is. In the light, however, of what we have reviewed in this study, why not decide to combine the best of both worlds, not necessarily putting down human attempts to present a certain picture of Yeshua (Jesus) or avoiding them altogether, but rather viewing such efforts from a balanced and fair perspective, while openly embracing what God has made available for us through the Scriptures with regard to authentically identifying with

the *passion of the Christ*?

The key factor is that “**if we suffer with Him, we shall reign with Him.**” If we really desire to connect with the suffering of our Savior, let us commit here and now to cease avoiding the strait and narrow way, and deciding to walk the path His footsteps trod.

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