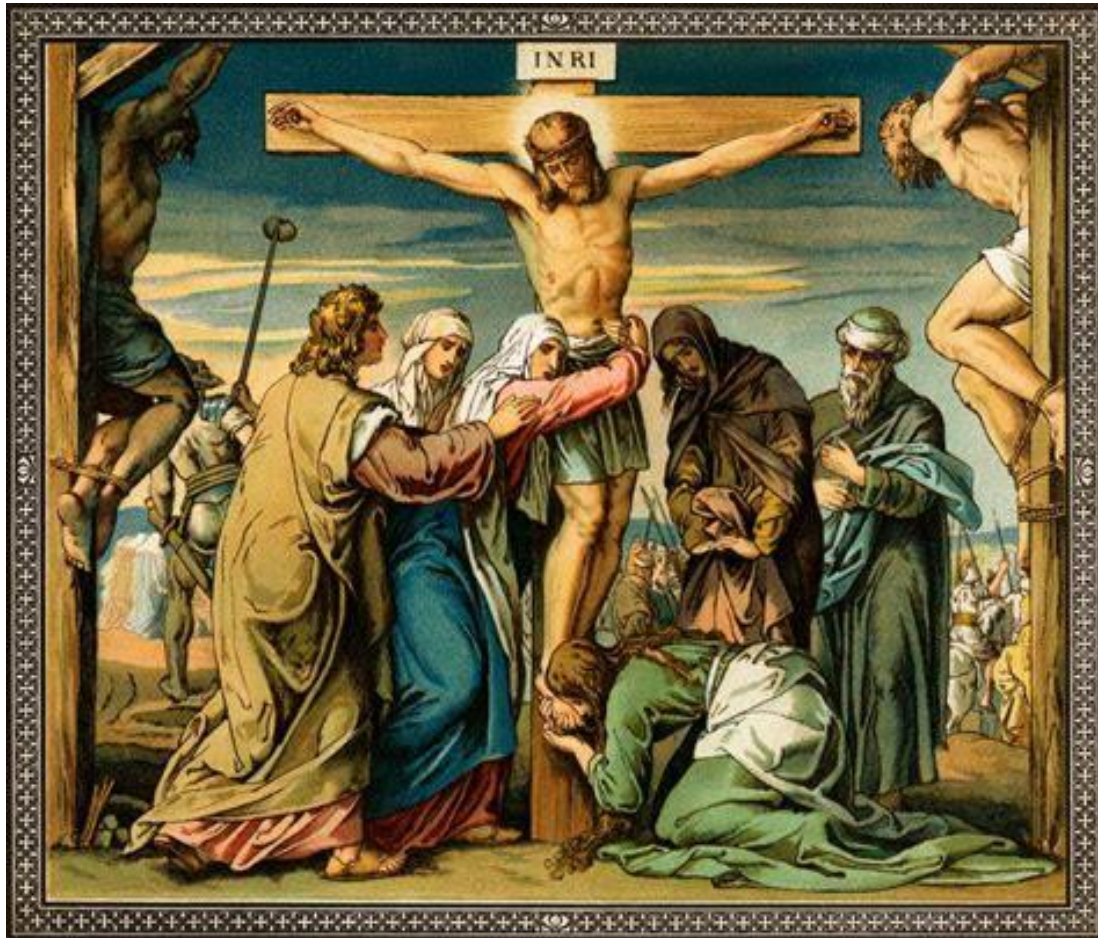




# *Last Days Beacon*

April 2023 - Vol. 8, No. 4 L-86

## IF CHRIST BE NOT CRUCIFIED



*By Dr. David Schnittger*

On April 9 of this year, Christians around the world commemorate the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ. Since this even took place in A.D. 29, that means that 1,994 years have passed since it's occurrence. And yet, despite the passage of almost two millennia of time, the crucifixion is still considered by many to be the pivotal event in all of history. This event, as well as the birth and resurrection of Christ, have inspired more books, songs, sermons, pictures and statues than any other event in history.

Let us take a brief look at one of the scriptural narratives of this earth-shattering event. The story of the crucifixion is told in each of the four gospels: In Matthew 27, Mark 15, Luke 23 and John 19. Each account, while basically conveying the same information, includes details which are unique to its particular account. I have chosen to look at the account given in Matthew's gospel. Beginning in chapter 27, and verse 31, we read;

“And after that they had mocked him, they took the robe off from him, and put his own raiment on him, and led him away to crucify him. And as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name, him they compelled to bear his cross. And when they were come unto a place called Golgotha that is to say, a place of a skull, They gave him vinegar to drink mingled with gall: and when he has tasted thereof, he would not drink. And they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots. And sitting down they watched him there. And set up over his head his accusation written, THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS. Then there were two thieves crucified with him, one on the right hand, and another on the left . . . Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? That is to say, My God, my God, why has thou forsaken me Some of them that stood there, when they heard that, said, This man called for Elias, And straightway one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink. The rest said, let us see whether Elias will come to save him. Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost. And behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom, and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent . . .”

Humanly speaking, what we have just read was among the greatest tragedies and injustices in all of history. A man who was faultless even in the eyes of his executioners and who had been a tremendous influence for good throughout Israel, had just been cruelly mocked and murdered. The disciples of Jesus were stunned and shattered with disappointment. Their Lord who had loved them and led them for over three life-changing years, was suddenly snatched from their presence. They were broken and disillusioned, filled with remorse and questions. “Why did He die? When did He leave us? What do I do now?” These questions echoed countless times in the throbbing minds of the disciples in those dark hours after the crucifixion. “If only He had not gone to Jerusalem,” one disciple most likely lamented. “If only the Master had held his tongue against the scribes and Pharisees,” wept a sorrowing follower. “If only I had not denied Him,” Peter cried bitterly. “If only He had not been crucified” was probably chorused by all who knew and loved the Master.

Dreams, direction, and aspiration all came crashing down in this seemingly tragic and needless course of events. The Lord was dead, His followers disheartened, and the question that screams for an answer was . . . WHY? Just suppose with me today that Christ had not been crucified. What if it never happened?

I contend that if Christ be not crucified, then the following statements are true. First, if Christ be not crucified, then the pronouncements of God's prophets would be false. Second, if Christ be not crucified, the prospects of God's people would be foolish. Third, if Christ be not crucified, the purpose of God's Son would be frustrated. Let us consider each of these statements separately.

## PRONOUNCEMENTS OF GOD'S PROPHETS



The first prophetic glimpse of the suffering Savior is found immediately after man's fall in the Garden of Eden. In Genesis 3:15 we read, "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; It shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." There is a natural suggestiveness in the figure used here. The serpent kills by striking the heel of man, but man destroys the serpent by crushing its head. These words foretell the ultimate defeat of Satan and his purposes to alienate all mankind from God. Notice, though, the cost that is involved in crushing Satan's head. The heel of the seed of the woman is bruised and is killed. Who is the seed of the woman? Only one man in all of history can qualify, and that is Jesus Christ. Only He was born apart from the seed of man. He had no earthly male progenitor. He was miraculously virgin born. His heel was bruised, so that Satan's head would be crushed. We see this truth brought out so clearly in Hebrews 2:24, where we read, "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he 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." So, we see even as far back as the time of man's fall, a prophetic glimpse of one who would be virgin born, and whose death would bring about the ultimate defeat of the devil.

There are many other Old Testament passages which foretell the crucifixion of Christ, but the two most forthright and extensive sections of Scripture on this are found in Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53. In Psalm 22, we have a remarkably vivid and detailed account of the crucifixion scene. While on the cross, Christ Himself quotes from the first verse of this Psalm, saying, "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" This verse calls attention to the predictions which proceed throughout the rest of the Psalm. Not only does this Psalm foresee that fact that the Messiah was to be forsaken by God, but that He was to be ridiculed and taunted (vv. 6-8); to suffer unspeakable agony (vv. 14-16); His bones were to be pulled out of joint (v. 14); He was to suffer thirst (v. 15); His hands and feet were to be pierced (v. 16); His garments were to be divided with the exception of his vesture, for which they would cast lots (v. 18); and finally he was to be brought to death (v. 15). This Psalm, therefore, presents a graphic picture of the sufferings of Christ on the cross fulfilled in every detail by the events recorded in the Gospels.

What makes this prophecy even more remarkable is the fact that this Psalm, written by King David in the 10<sup>th</sup> century B.C. describes a form of torturous death that did not even exist at that time. The form of crucifixion described in Psalm 22 was developed and practiced during the Roman period of history, some 700 years after David's writing. When you consider that King David was writing in great detail concerning the death of One yet ten centuries hence, dying in a manner which was totally foreign to

David's knowledge, and for a reason that was probably obscure in his thinking, this prophecy becomes remarkable indeed.

The other outstanding prophetic picture of the suffering Messiah is found in Isaiah 53. Not only are His sufferings accurately pictured here but their redemptive purpose is also clearly revealed. We learn in this incomparable chapter that the Messiah would be despised and rejected, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. He would be smitten of God, wounded for our transgressions, and bruised (or killed) for our iniquities. Yet, despite these unspeakable sufferings, He would bear them in silence and subjection. Even the place of His burial is hinted at in verse nine where it says, "And he made his grave with the wicked, AND WITH THE RICH IN HIS DEATH . . ."

This prophecy found its fulfillment when the wealthy and honorable Joseph of Arimathea offered his family tomb for the internment of Jesus. This suffering and death on man's behalf would completely satisfy the holiness and justice of God. We see this in Isaiah 53:11 where it is written, "He (God) shall see of the travail of his (Jesus') soul, and shall be satisfied . . ." An excellent summary of Christ's redemptive work on the cross is foretold in the latter half of verse 12, the closing statements of the chapter: ". . . because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors."

Many other scattered references to the death of Christ complete the picture of prophecy. He was to be betrayed by a friend (Ps. 41:9), falsely accused (Ps. 35:11), spat upon (Isa. 50:6) and His bones were not to be broken (Ps. 34:20). This, by the way, was a departure from the usual Roman custom of breaking the legs of the victims to speed up the death process. Many other prophetic Scriptures provide other details of His suffering.

Let's go back now to our original question: What if Christ be not crucified? Then the pronouncements made by God's prophets would be false. If Christ had not died upon that cross, in the exact manner that He did, then God would have been made a liar. God promised a suffering Messiah and described in minutest detail the manner of His rejection, suffering, and death. We echo the words of Paul in Romans 4:21, "And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform." The crucifixion was, therefore, the fulfillment of the pronouncements of God's prophets.

## THE PROSPECTS OF GOD'S PEOPLE



The next statement that would be true if Christ be not crucified is that the prospects of God's people would be foolish. The whole Jewish sacrificial system had the crucifixion of Christ in view. Consider with me the first recorded sacrifices in the Bible. We read in Genesis 4:3-5: "And in the process of time it came to pass, that Abel brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering: But unto Cain and his offering he had not respect." Why was Abel's offering respected and Cain's not? Because Abel's offering involved the shedding of blood unto death, and Cain's did not. The eternal principle in Scripture in regard to the forgiveness of sin is found in the latter clause of Hebrews 9:22: ". . . and without shedding of blood is no remission" (of sins).

Throughout Old Testament times, even before the giving of the law, God's people were under a strict and elaborate sacrificial system. We read in Genesis 8:20 that Noah, after the flood, ". . . built an altar unto the Lord; and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt offerings on the altar." The patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob also offered many sacrifices to the Lord.

A great advance in the organization and differentiation of sacrifices occurred with the giving of the law at Sinai. At that time many different types of sacrifices were instituted to meet the needs of both the individual and the community. There were regular daily sacrifices performed by the priest in the appointed place of worship. There were special sabbath day offerings. There was a new moon offering which occurred each month, and there were five annual religious assemblies, each with its own elaborate sacrificial requirements. Sacrifices were also made on special occasions, such as the making of a covenant, or during a time of dedication or consecration.

The book of Hebrews gives us a great deal of insight as to the prospect which these sacrifices had in view. We read in Hebrews 10:1-4: "For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins. But in those sacrifices, there is a remembrance again made of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins." God's people during the Old Testament economy realized that their animal sacrifices could not take away sins, but would only cover them temporarily. These temporary and imperfect sacrifice had a permanent and perfect sacrifice in prospect.

There are several verses in Hebrews which emphasized the permanent atoning value of the sacrifice of Christ. In Hebrews 9:12 we read, "Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in ONCE into the holy place, having obtained ETERNAL redemption for us." Hebrews 9:25-26 reads, "Not yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood others; For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now ONCE in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." And then finally in Hebrews 10:14 we read, "For by ONE offering he hath perfected FOR EVER them that are sanctified" (caps added).

This offering was *permanent* because this offering was *perfect*! We read in 1 Peter 1:18-19, "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." As stated so succinctly in 2 Corinthians 5:21, "For he hath made him to be sin for us who knew no sin . . ."

If Christ had not been crucified, that would have made the prospects of God's people foolish. The elaborate, extensive and exacting sacrificial system, so obviously temporary and imperfect in nature, would have been rendered meaningless if Christ had not shed His blood unto death as the permanent and perfect sacrifice for sin.

## THE PURPOSES OF GOD'S SON



The third statement that would be true if Christ be not crucified, is that the purposes of God's Son would be frustrated. Jesus concisely summarized the purposes of His life on earth in Mark 10:45, "For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to GIVE HIS LIFE A RANSOM FOR MANY."

Although Christ knew before He ever left the ivory palaces of glory that His main purpose in coming to earth was to be slain as a sin offering for man, He revealed this purpose to His disciples gradually. In Matthew 12:40, He uses an analogy to present His coming crucifixion. "For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."

As our Lord's appointment with the cross drew near, in the final months of His earthly ministry, He began to speak more frequently and explicitly concerning His crucifixion. In Matthew 16:21-23 we read, "From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee. But he turned and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men." Jesus recognized that Satan was utterly opposed to His being crucified, and would use even Peter, the spokesman for the disciples, to try to dissuade Him.

Despite the many times the disciples were told of the coming crucifixion, Scripture tells us in Mark 9:32, "BUT THEY UNDERSTOOD NOT that saying, and were afraid to ask him." They could understand His kingship, His kingdom and His power, but they did not want to understand and face the awful fact that He must first die a cruel death to accomplish man's redemption. Jesus knew full well the ordeal which faced Him, and He set his face like a flint toward Jerusalem, moving steadily, right on schedule toward the appointed hour.

He was not carried away by the "Hosannas" and palm branches as He entered Jerusalem on that Palm Sunday. The crowds thought He was coming to liberate and to reign. He knew that He was coming to suffer and to die. He was not the fugitive, taken by surprise in the Garden of Gethsemane, trembling at the mercy of His seeming captors. They were the fugitives, mere pawns in the eternal

purpose of God, completely at the mercy of Him who held at the bay the righteous fury of legions of God's destroying angels. He was not the victim as He stood silent before the mockeries of justice that supposedly sentenced Him to death. He knew that the sentence had already being passed in the eons of time before the foundations of the earth. We learn in Revelation 13:8c that He was ". . . the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." He was no starry-eyed pseudo-savior admitting defeat when He uttered the words, "It is finished." He was the conquering One, proclaiming victory. The prophetic Scriptures concerning His death has been fulfilled to the letter, the prospects of God's people have been fully realized, and the purposes of God's Son has been completely and unalterably accomplished. "It is finished!" He spoke triumphantly.

With the completion of this redemptive work, He utters His last words before death in Luke 23:46, ". . . Father, into thy hands, I commend my spirit: and having said thus, He gave up the ghost." He was in control every step of the way, even to the point of death. We learn in John 10:17-18 of His power and prerogative, when Christ proclaims, "Therefore doth my Father love me because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself, and . . . I have power to take it again . . ." So, we see that Christ was not the victim on the cross, but rather the victor. His death paid the penalty for man's sin, so that all who receive Him and what He did, will be freely forgiven, and will receive the gift of eternal life. All that needs to be done, and can be done for your salvation, has been done. "It is finished." Romans 10:9 states, "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." The question that remains for you to answer is, "What will you do with Jesus?" Is there any good reason why you will not receive Him today? What better time is there to trust in the finished work of Christ than during this Easter season?

## THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO PILATE



A manuscript has been found in the mosque of St. Sofia in Constantinople, Turkey, alleged to be Pilate's report to Caesar of the arrest, trial and crucifixion of Jesus. Let me quote from it briefly:

"I ordered Jesus to be scourged, hoping this might satisfy them; but it only increased their fury. I then called for a basin, and washed my hands in the presence of the clamorous multitude, thus testifying that in my judgment Jesus of Nazareth had done nothing deserving of death; but in vain. It was his life these wretches thirsted for.

"Often in our civil commotions have I witnessed the furious anger of the multitude, but nothing could be compared to what I witnessed on this occasion. It might have been truly said that all the phantoms of the infernal regions had assembled at Jerusalem.

"The crowd appeared not to walk, but to be borne off and whirled as a vortex, rolling along in living waves from the portals of the praetorium even unto Mount Zion, with howling screams, shrieks, and vociferations such as were never heard in the seditions of the Pannonia, or in the tumults of the forum.

"By degrees the day darkened like a winter's twilight, such as had been at the death of the great Julius Caesar. It was likewise the Ides of March. I, the continued governor of a rebellious province, was leaning against a column of my basilica, contemplating a way to thwart the dreary gloom these fiends of Tartarus dragging to execution the innocent Nazarene . . .

"Whilst these appalling scenes of nature were transpiring, there was a dreadful earthquake in lower Egypt, which filled everybody with fear, and scared the superstitious Jews almost to death . . . Before the first hour of the night, I threw my mantle around me, and went down into the city toward the gates of Golgotha. The sacrifice was consummated."

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P.O. Box 58043, Oklahoma City OK 73157  
5 copies for \$5.00  
25 copies for \$15.00