

## Redemption 304: Crucifixion Study



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Brian K. McPherson and Scott McPherson

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### Crucifixion Study – Part Three

#### *The Traditional Sites for the Location of Christ's Death, Burial, and Resurrection*

It is important to note that locating Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection to the Mount of Olives contradicts the conventional view that locates these events to the place occupied by the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. As an alternative to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre a second site known as the Garden Tomb area has been suggested by some to be the real location of these important events. Above we have examined the biblical and historical evidence leading to the conclusion that Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection took place on the Mount of Olives. For comparison, we will now provide a basic synopsis of the information we have about the traditional site at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre as well as the Garden Tomb. We will start with the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

Prior to Constantine's construction of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the site now occupied by the church, had been the location of a pagan shrine or temple to Venus (or Aphrodite) that had stood there since the second century.

**Church of the Holy Sepulchre** – The Church of the Holy Sepulchre, also called the Church of the Resurrection by Eastern Christians, is a church within the walled Old City of Jerusalem. It is a few steps away from the Muristan. **The site is venerated as Golgotha[1] (the Hill of Calvary), where Jesus was crucified,[2] and is said also to contain the place where Jesus was buried (the sepulchre). The church has been an important Christian pilgrimage destination since at least the 4th century, as the purported site of the resurrection of Jesus...**History – Construction – The Edicule of the Holy Sepulchre (The Tomb of Christ) with the dome of the rotunda visible above. **In the early 2nd century, the site of the present Church had been a temple of Aphrodite; several ancient writers alternatively describe it as a temple to Venus, the Roman equivalent to Aphrodite.** – wikipedia.org

**Holy Sepulchre** – The Church of the Holy Sepulchre lies in the northwest quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem. Constantine the Great first built a church on the site. It was dedicated about ad 336...This site has been continuously recognized since the 4th century as the place where Jesus died, was buried, and rose from the dead. – Encyclopedia Britannica

Besides these basic facts, there are several important historical details to grasp regarding the Church of the Holy Sepulchre as the site of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. First, we must note that this site is not near the garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives where Jesus was arrested. To the contrary, the location of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre is on the northwestern site of the ancient city of Jerusalem. Put simply, this location is all the way across town from the location of Jesus' arrest on the Mount of Olives.

**Holy Sepulchre – The Church of the Holy Sepulchre lies in the northwest quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem.** – Encyclopedia Britannica

Second, this site has nothing to do with the the location of the altar of burning on the Mount of Olives where the red heifer was killed and burned and which the Book of Hebrews clearly identifies as the place of Jesus' death. These biblical and historical realities do not naturally fit with the location of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. As such we might wonder why the site of the church was selected in the first place.

The best answer we could hope for is that the site was chosen because of longstanding and well-known Christian traditions which placed Christ's death, burial, and resurrection at that site. Unfortunately, however, this is not the case.

When Constantine sought the location of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection in order to build a church on that site he did not consult local Christians, Christian traditions, or church historians. He did not ask where these things had occurred and then build a church there. Nor is it the case that local Christians, Christian traditions, or church historians had any record that the site Constantine chose had any significance or relationship to Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. These facts are reported to us by two major church historians of the fourth and fifth centuries: Eusebius and Sozomen.

**Eusebius of Caesarea** – Eusebius of Caesarea (c. AD 263 – 339) also called Eusebius Pamphili, was a **Roman historian, exegete and Christian polemicist. He became the Bishop of Caesarea in Palestine about the year 314.** Together with Pamphilus, he was a scholar of the Biblical canon. **He wrote Demonstrations of the Gospel, Preparations for the Gospel, and On Discrepancies between the Gospels, studies of the Biblical text. As "Father of Church History" he produced the Ecclesiastical History, On the Life of Pamphilus, the Chronicle and On the Martyrs.** – wikipedia.org

**Sozomen** – Salminius Hermias Sozomenus[1] (Σωζομενός) (c. 400 – c. 450) was a **historian of the Christian church.** – wikipedia.org

**Sozomen** – **Sozomen , 5th cent., Byzantine church historian,** b. Gaza. A fuller form of his name is Salaminus Hermias Sozomenus. **His Ecclesiastical History was written in 439-50. The nine extant books, written in an elegant Greek style, cover the years 324-439 and** are primarily drawn from the history of

Socrates Scholasticus, to which Sozomen added some new material. **Sozomen's history continues that of Eusebius of Caesarea.** – Columbia Encyclopedia

In his account of these matters, Sozomen the fifth-century church historian reports that identifying the location of Calvary and the Lord's tomb was no easy matter. He also reports that Christians did not know the spot of Christ's death and burial because they had forgotten its location. Sozomen provides two possible sources for Constantine's selection of the location. He states that according to some the first person to identify the future site of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre as the location of Christ's death and burial was not a Christian at all.

When the business at Nicæa had been transacted as above related, the priests returned home. **The emperor** rejoiced exceedingly at the restoration of unity of opinion in the Catholic Church, and desirous of expressing in behalf of himself, his children, and the empire, the gratitude towards God which the unanimity of the bishops inspired, he **directed that a house of prayer should be erected to God at Jerusalem near the place called Calvary.** At the same time his mother Helena repaired to the city for the purpose of offering up prayer, and of visiting the sacred places. **Her zeal for Christianity made her anxious to find the wood which had formed the adorable cross. But it was no easy matter to discover either this relic or the Lord's sepulchre;** for **the Pagans**, who in former times had persecuted the Church, and who, at the first promulgation of Christianity, had had recourse to every artifice to exterminate it, **had concealed that spot** under much heaped up earth, and elevated what before was quite depressed, as it looks now, and the more effectually to conceal them, **had enclosed the entire place of the resurrection and Mount Calvary within a wall, and had, moreover, ornamented the whole locality, and paved it with stone. They also erected a temple to Aphrodite,** and set up a little image, so that those who repaired thither to worship Christ would appear to bow the knee to Aphrodite, and that thus the true cause of offering worship in that place would, **in course of time, be forgotten;** and that as Christians would not dare fearlessly to frequent the place or to point it out to others, **the temple and statue would come to be regarded as exclusively appertaining to the Pagans. At length, however, the place was discovered, and the fraud about it so zealously maintained was detected; some say that the facts were first disclosed by a Hebrew who dwelt in the East, and who derived his information from some documents which had come to him by paternal inheritance; but it seems more accordant with truth to suppose that God revealed the fact by means of signs and dreams; for I do not think that human information is requisite when God thinks it best to make manifest the same.** – Sozomen, Book II, The Ecclesiastical History of Sozomen, Chapter I — The Discovery of the Life-Bringing Cross and of the Holy Nails.

According to Sozomen, these accounts identified a non-Christian, Jewish man from the East as the possible source for locating the site of Christ's death and burial. It is important to ask why a non-Christian, Jewish man who was not from Jerusalem would have documents marking the location of Jesus' death and burial. Furthermore, the necessity of getting such critical information from this kind of

source points out the utter lack of information Christians had in the fourth-century regarding the location of Christ's death and his tomb. These facts demonstrate that the site of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre was not chosen based on historical documentation or evidence or even existing Christian traditions and understanding. Rather, Constantine's selection of the site was a novel development that was completely unrelated to both scripture and historical data. As Sozomen goes on to explain, the real reason for the selection of the site was, not due to historical documents or evidence of any kind, but from supposed, miraculous revelations that Constantine had himself personally received from God.

It is also important to note that Eusebius provides a similar understanding regarding the selection of the Venus Shrine. Eusebius himself was a native of Palestine and he was very familiar with Christian works from the first two centuries which he used to compile his own extensive history of the church. It is therefore highly significant that Eusebius' response to the selection of the site of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre as the place of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection was, in his own words, "contrary to all expectation."

This also was accomplished without delay. But as soon as the original surface of the ground, beneath the covering of earth, appeared, immediately, and **contrary to all expectation, the venerable and hollowed monument of our Saviour's resurrection was discovered.** Then indeed did this most holy cave present a faithful similitude of his return to life, in that, after lying buried in darkness, it again emerged to light, and afforded to all who came to witness the sight, a clear and visible proof of the wonders of which that spot had once been the scene, a testimony to the resurrection of the Saviour clearer than any voice could give. – Eusebius, The Life of Constantine, Book III, Chapter XXVIII — **Discovery of the Most Holy Sepulchre**

In the speech that Eusebius gave at the dedication of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, he humbly asked Constantine to explain to him and the other bishops why the site had been identified as the location of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. In his own words, Eusebius only knew that the site was chosen by Constantine on the basis of supernatural insight that the emperor alone possessed.

1. These words of ours, however, [gracious] Sovereign, may well appear superfluous in your ears, convinced as you are, by frequent and personal experience, of our Saviour's Deity; yourself also, in actions still more than words, a herald of the truth to all mankind. **Yourself, it may be, will vouchsafe at a time of leisure to relate to us the abundant manifestations which your Saviour has accorded you of his presence, and the oft-repeated visions of himself which have attended you in the hours of sleep. I speak not of those secret suggestions which to us are unrevealed:** but of those principles which he has instilled into your own mind, and which are fraught with general interest and benefit to the human race. You will yourself relate in worthy terms the visible protection which your Divine shield and guardian has extended in the hour of battle; the ruin of your open and secret foes; and his ready aid in time of peril. To

him you will ascribe relief in the midst of perplexity; defence in solitude; expedients in extremity; foreknowledge of events yet future; your forethought for the general weal; your power to investigate uncertain questions; your conduct of most important enterprises; your administration of civil affairs; your military arrangements, and correction of abuses in all departments; your ordinances respecting public right; and, lastly, your legislation for the common benefit of all. **You will, it may be, also detail to us those particulars of his favor which are secret to us, but known to you alone, and treasured in your royal memory as in secret storehouses. Such, doubtless, are the reasons,** and such the convincing proofs of your Saviour's power, **which caused you to raise that sacred edifice which presents to all, believers and unbelievers alike, a trophy of his victory over death, a holy temple of the holy God: to consecrate those noble and splendid monuments of immortal life** and his heavenly kingdom: to offer memorials **of our Almighty Saviour's conquest** which well become the imperial dignity of him by whom they are bestowed. **With such memorials have you adorned that edifice which witnesses of eternal life:** thus, as it were in imperial characters, ascribing victory and triumph to the heavenly Word of God: thus proclaiming to all nations, with clear and unmistakable voice, in deed and word, your own devout and pious confession of his name. – Eusebius, The Oration of Eusebius, Chapter XVIII

These remarks from two of the most historically aware figures of the fourth and fifth-century demonstrate that the location of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre had no known historical connection to the actual site of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection. On the contrary, the location the Church of the Holy Sepulchre is merely a site selected by Constantine over three hundred years after the actual events solely on the basis of supposed personal revelation from God (and questionable miraculous proofs) with no historical or biblical support.

And while, according to Eusebius and Sozomen, Christians had no knowledge or interest in the site of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, it is worth noting that there was a cave on the Mount of Olives that Christians had venerated for centuries.

Which it is possible for us to see literally fulfilled in another way even to-day, since **believers in Christ all congregate from all parts of the world,** not as of old time because of the glory of Jerusalem, nor that they may worship in the ancient Temple at Jerusalem, but they rest there that they may learn both about the city being taken and devastated as the prophets foretold, and **that they may worship at the Mount of Olives opposite to the city,** whither the glory of the Lord migrated when it left the former city. **There stood in truth according to the common and received account the feet of our Lord and Saviour, Himself the Word of God, through that tabernacle of humanity He had borne up the Mount of Olives to the cave that is shewn there; there He prayed and delivered to His disciples on the summit of the Mount of Olives the mysteries of His end, and thence He made His Ascension into heaven, as Luke tells us in the Acts of the Apostles, saying that while the apostles were with Him on the Mount of Olives:** "While they beheld he was taken up, and a cloud received

him out of their sight. And as they gazed steadfastly into heaven while he went up, behold two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing into heaven? This same Jesus that is taken up from you into heaven shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." To which he adds: "Then they returned from the mount called the Mount of Olives, which is opposite to Jerusalem." **The Mount of Olives is therefore literally opposite to Jerusalem and to the east of it, but also the Holy Church of God, and the mount upon which it is founded, of which the Saviour teaches: "A city set on a hill cannot be hid," raised up in place of Jerusalem that is fallen never to rise again, and thought worthy of the feet of the Lord, is figuratively not only opposite to Jerusalem, but east of it as well, receiving the rays of the divine light, and become much before Jerusalem,** and near to the Sun of Righteousness Himself, of Whom it is said: "And on them that fear me shall the sun of righteousness arise." – Eusebius, *Demonstratio evangelica*, Book VI, Chapter 18

We can see that prior to the time of Constantine in the fourth-century, Christians found significance in a cave on the Mount of Olives near to where the New Testament states Jesus taught his apostles and ascended. These historical details fit with our earlier examination of biblical data which lead us to conclude that Christ died, was buried, and rose from the dead in a garden on the Mount of Olives where he frequently spent time, taught his apostles, and was arrested. When the biblical and historical data is consulted we can see that there is very strong reason to doubt the veracity of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre as the actual site of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. These observations have been made by other scholars and historians as well. Encyclopedia Britannica notes that whether the site of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre is the actual place of Christ's death and burial is hotly debated. The article goes on to say that it "cannot be determined that Christians during the first three centuries could or did preserve an authentic tradition as to where these events occurred."

**Holy Sepulchre – The Church of the Holy Sepulchre lies in the northwest quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem. Constantine the Great first built a church on the site. It was dedicated about ad 336...This site has been continuously recognized since the 4th century as the place where Jesus died, was buried, and rose from the dead. Whether it is the actual place, however, has been hotly debated. It cannot be determined that Christians during the first three centuries could or did preserve an authentic tradition as to where these events occurred.** Members of the Christian church in Jerusalem fled to Pella about ad 66, and Jerusalem was destroyed in ad 70. Wars, destruction, and confusion during the following centuries possibly prevented preservation of exact information. – Encyclopedia Britannica

Other historical and archeological difficulties exist regarding the location of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. Again, Encyclopedia Britannica explains the relevance of the location of the church in relation to the location of first-century Jerusalem.

**Holy Sepulchre – Another question involves the course of the second north wall of ancient Jerusalem. Some archaeological remains on the east and south sides of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre are widely interpreted to mark the course of the second wall. If so, the site of the church lay just outside the city wall in the time of Jesus, and this could be the actual place of his Crucifixion and burial.** – Encyclopedia Britannica

According to Encyclopedia Britannica, if the second wall of ancient Jerusalem does, in fact, run to the east and south of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, then it is theoretically possible that this location was outside ancient Jerusalem and could, therefore, have been the location of Christ's death and burial. The counterpoint is that if the site of the church was within Jerusalem's walls, Jesus could not have been executed or buried there. We have already seen the biblical and historical requirements that capital punishment had to take place outside the city. So, if the location of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre was within the city, then Christ could not have been executed there.

There is obviously some debate over the archeological remains near the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and whether they are the ruins of the second wall of first-century Jerusalem. However, these are not the only potential historical or archeological problems regarding locating Christ's death, burial, and resurrection, to the site of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. In its article on the main alternative site to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, wikipedia.org mentions some of the other difficulties that have been suggested regarding the location of the church.

**The Garden Tomb – Motivation and discovery –**

**During the nineteenth century some doubts were raised concerning the authenticity of the traditional site, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre:**

- Prior to Constantine's time, the site was a temple to Aphrodite, built by Hadrian.[3]
- **Archaeology suggests that the exact location claimed for the tomb would have been within Hadrian's Temple, or likely to have been destroyed under the temple's heavy retaining wall.**[4][5]
- The temple's location complies with the typical layout of Roman cities (i.e. adjacent to the Forum, at the intersection of the main north-south road with the main east-west road), rather than necessarily being a deliberate act of contempt for Christianity.
- A spur would be required for the rockface to have included both the alleged site of the tomb and the tombs beyond the western end of the church.
- **First century Jewish leaders condemn the idea of burial to the west of the city,[6] a condemnation archaeologically corroborated by the locations of the known ancient Jewish graves.**[7]
- The site is currently within the Old City walls, and **due to the heights of the terrain, it would be dangerous and unlikely, from a town-defense point of view, for the walls to have previously been east of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.**[8]

- The tombs at the west of the site, alleged to date from the first century, therefore indicating that the site was outside the city at that time, could just as easily date from centuries prior to that.[9] – wikipedia.org

As the article above documents, potential problems with the location of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre include: 1) first-century geography in the area would have been utterly demolished when Hadrian constructed his temple to Venus, 2) first-century Jewish condemnation of burial to the west of the city of Jerusalem in the area of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and 3) the terrain of first-century Jerusalem would probably have required the city walls to be located west of the site of the church rather than east and therefore placing the site within the city of Jerusalem, which means it would have been illegal to bury someone there.

As the article concludes, these potentially serious archeological difficulties have resulted in several nineteenth-century scholars to reject the Church of the Holy Sepulchre as the site of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection.

**Due to these issues, several nineteenth century scholars had rejected the traditional site's validity.**[10] – wikipedia.org

We can see that the site of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre is not only seriously deficient in historical and biblical corroboration and dependent on claims of late-dating miraculous revelation, but it may involve other archeological and geographic impossibilities as well. These considerations coupled with the biblical material we examined earlier warrant the conclusion that there is little compelling reason to accept the Church of the Holy Sepulchre as the site of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. However, the alternative site, known as the Garden Tomb also suffers from a lack of serious evidential support.

The first difficulty concerns the date when the Garden Tomb was first suggested as a possible location for the New Testament events. If it is problematic that the Church of the Holy Sepulchre wasn't identified with the place of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection until 300 years after the actual events, then it is perhaps even more problematic that the Garden Tomb site wasn't identified as a possibility until 1800 year later.

**The Garden Tomb** – The Garden Tomb (also known as Gordon's Calvary),[1] located in Jerusalem, outside the city walls and close to the Damascus Gate, is a **rock-cut tomb considered by some to be the site of the burial and resurrection of Jesus**, and to be adjacent to Golgotha,[2] **in contradistinction to the traditional site for these—the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. There is no mention of the Garden Tomb as the place of Jesus' burial before the nineteenth century.** – wikipedia.org

**Due to these issues, several nineteenth century scholars had rejected the traditional site's validity...In 1883, near to the Damascus Gate, General Gordon found a rocky escarpment (now situated just behind a bus station),**



**which from several angles resembled the face of a skull; since one of the possible etymologies for Golgotha is the Aramaic word for skull, and may refer to the shape of the place, Gordon concluded that the rocky escarpment was likely to have been Golgotha. Prior to Gordon, this possibility had also been suggested by Colonel Conder in 1870** (an associate of Lord Kitchener),<sup>[11]</sup> by Fisher Howe in 1871,<sup>[12]</sup> and by the German scholar Otto Thenius in 1842.<sup>[13]</sup> – wikipedia.org

As the wikipedia article shows, the major lines of evidence in support of the Garden Tomb area largely involve pointing out the problems with the site of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. In reality the problems with the the site of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre only serve to eliminate that site itself from contention. They do not prove or provide support for the conclusion that the Garden Tomb area must, therefore, be the correct site. In point of fact, support for the Garden Tomb as the site of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection also fails to be particularly compelling.

**In 1869 a number of tombs had also been found near Gordon's Golgotha, and Gordon concluded that one of them must have been the tomb of Jesus.** John also specifies that Jesus' tomb was located in a garden;<sup>[14]</sup> consequently, **an ancient wine press and cistern have been cited as evidence that the area had once been a garden, and the somewhat isolated tomb adjacent to the cistern has become identified as the Garden Tomb of Jesus. This particular tomb also has a stone groove running along the ground outside it, which Gordon argued to be a slot that once housed a stone, corresponding to the biblical account of a stone being rolled over the tomb entrance to close it.** – wikipedia.org

The site does contain what appears to be a first-century burial site with several tombs in what also seems to have been a garden-like environ. However, the outskirts of ancient Jerusalem contained more than one burial site. There is little reason to conclude that the particular site at the Garden Tomb area has any real relationship with the actual location in which the New Testament events occurred. The rock formation that today may bare some resemblance to a skull is subject to erosion and is, therefore, a feature that is not likely to have resembled a skull several hundred years ago let alone 2,000 years ago in the first century AD. Likewise, there is no clear biblical or historical data indicating that “Golgotha” (which means “the place of the skull”) referred to a rock formation that looked like the eye sockets and nose of a human skull. Alternative explanations are equally plausible including: 1) that the term refers to a round stone outcropping that looked like a bald head, 2) that the term simply denotes a place of death, or 3) that it was a place where there were actual human skulls.

“As mentioned in the introduction to this book, **three general suggestions have been made:** 1) Golgotha was so named because **skulls were found there;** or 2) it may have been **a place of execution** and this reference to the skull might indicate this; or 3) **some topographical features in the area might have resembled some part (or parts) of a human head** or skull (either a rounded outcropping of

earth shaped like the top part of a person's head, or perhaps it was a region where two caves presented the appearance of the eye sockets of a skull). **The preponderance of the scholarly opinion believes that "Skull Place" was shaped like the top part of a human skull.** – quoted from Ernest L. Martin, *Secrets of Golgatha*, p. 58-59

In addition, the Garden Tomb site is north of ancient Jerusalem, while biblical and early historical data shows that Christ died and was buried in the same garden on the Mount of Olives where he was arrested. This garden was east of Jerusalem and the Temple and near the altar where the red heifer was burned. By comparison, the Garden Tomb site has no connection to biblical or historical data. For these reasons Encyclopedia Britannica's article on the Holy Sepulchre states that besides Constantine's church, "no rival site is supported by any real evidence."

**Holy Sepulchre – No rival site is supported by any real evidence.** – Encyclopedia Britannica

The historical and archeological details demonstrate that neither the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, nor the Garden Tomb area offer compelling biblical or historical support to challenge the much stronger biblical and historical data pointing towards Christ's crucifixion, burial, and resurrection in the garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives east of Jerusalem and the Temple near the location of the altar where the red heifer was killed and burned.

### *Connections between the Location of Jesus Death and Genesis 3*

Having seen that biblical and historical evidence lead us to conclude that Jesus was crucified in a garden on the Mount of Olives, it is worth noting additional biblical significance that accompanies this site. First, we can point out that this site was likely populated by fig trees. Fig trees were common to the slopes of the Mount of Olives in biblical times.

**Fig, Fig Tree** – The fig tree (*Ficus carica*) is very common in Palestine. (8:8) **Mount Olivet was famous for its fig trees in ancient times, and they are still found there.** – Smith's Bible Dictionary

The gospels also specifically attest that there was at least one fig tree in or near the location of Jesus' death. Both Matthew and Mark provide an account in which Jesus was again visiting Jerusalem after visiting Bethany. As he headed with his disciples toward Jerusalem he no doubt took the usual route over the Mount of Olives near the garden of Gethsemane. Along this route, Jesus encountered a fig tree.

**Matthew 21:17 And he left them, and went out of the city into Bethany; and he lodged there. 18 Now in the morning as he returned into the city, he**

hungered. 19 **And when he saw a fig tree in the way, he came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only, and said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever. And presently the fig tree withered away.** 20 **And when the disciples saw it, they marvelled, saying, How soon is the fig tree withered away!** 21 Jesus answered and said unto them, Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done. 22 And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.

**Mark 11:11 And Jesus entered into Jerusalem, and into the temple:** and when he had looked round about upon all things, and now the eventide was come, **he went out unto Bethany with the twelve.** 12 **And on the morrow, when they were come from Bethany, he was hungry:** 13 **And seeing a fig tree afar off having leaves,** he came, if haply he might find any thing thereon: and when he came to it, he found nothing but leaves; for the time of figs was not yet. 14 **And Jesus answered and said unto it, No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever. And his disciples heard it...** 19 **And when even was come, he went out of the city.** 20 **And in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots.** 21 And Peter calling to remembrance saith unto him, Master, behold, the fig tree which thou cursedst is withered away.

The circumstances of Jesus' encounter with this fig tree are intriguing. First, the gospels report that there were no figs on the tree, only leaves, and that Jesus was displeased about this. Jesus' displeasure may not seem to be that odd of a factor if we presume that there should have been figs on the tree for Jesus to eat. However, we have to keep in mind that these events took place before Passover that year. This means it would have been sometime in March or April. As Smith's Bible dictionary explains, figs typically aren't ripe and ready until sometime in May or June.

**Fig, Fig Tree** – The fig tree (*Ficus carica*) is very common in Palestine. (8:8) Mount Olivet was famous for its fig trees in ancient times, and they are still found there. To "sit under one's own vine and one's own fig tree" became a proverbial expression among the Jews to denote peace and prosperity. (1 Kings 4:25; Micah 4:4; Zechariah 3:10) The fig is a pear-shaped fruit, and is much used by the Orientals for food. The young figs are especially prized for their sweetness and flavor. **The fruit always appears before the leaves;** so that when Christ saw leaves on the fig tree by the wayside, (Mark 11:13) he had a right to expect fruit. **The usual summer crop of fruits is not gathered till May or June;** but in the sunny ravines of Olivet fig trees could have ripe fruit some weeks earlier (Dr. Thomson), and it was not strange so early as Easter Christ might find the young eatable figs, although **it was not the usual season for gathering the fruit.** – Smith's Bible Dictionary

While it is conceivable that figs could have been on the tree weeks earlier, the fact that the tree wasn't likely to have much or any ripe fruit yet seems to make Jesus' cursing of the tree unreasonable. And yet, of all the things Jesus did that weren't

recorded in the gospels (John 21:25,) Matthew and Mark both felt this miraculous event was important for later Christians to hear. Their report of this event also indicates that Jesus felt there was some greater significance to be learned from the occasion. Otherwise, why would Jesus take the time to utterly curse a fig tree for not having fruit before its figs were likely to be ripe to eat?

As we consider the possible significance of this story, we must note that Jesus' problem is that the tree had no fruit. It only had leaves. Undoubtedly, all of last year's crop would have been eaten as the tree was near a well-traveled road. What we have here then is a fig tree near or in a garden which had no real sustenance to benefit any man or woman who passed by it. All its fruit had been eaten. And all it had to offer was leaves.

With these facts in mind, potential parallels to Genesis 3 begin to emerge for our consideration. Genesis 3 reports that there was also a fig tree in the garden of Eden. In fact, this is the only kind of tree that is specifically named in the text. Oddly enough, the leaves of the fig tree are significant to the story. After Adam and Eve sinned by eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they sought to cover themselves with the leaves of the fig tree.

**Genesis 3:1 Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? 2 And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: 3 But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. 4 And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: 5 For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. 6 And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat. 7 And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons. 8 And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden. 9 And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou? 10 And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself. 11 And he said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat? 12 And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat....17 And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; 18 Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; 19 In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.**

Interestingly enough, ancient Jewish traditions understood Genesis 3 to be indicating that the fig tree was itself the tree of knowledge. These accounts are found in the Midrash Rabbah.

**Midrash Rabba – Midrash Rabba or Midrash Rabbah can refer to part of or the collective whole of aggadic midrashim on the books of the Tanach,** generally having the term "Rabbah" (הבר), meaning "great," as part of their name. These midrashim are as follows: Genesis Rabbah... – wikipedia.org

**Genesis Rabba – Genesis Rabba (B'reshith Rabba in Hebrew: הבר תישארב)** is a religious text from Judaism's classical period. It is a midrash comprising a collection of **ancient rabbinical homiletical interpretations of the Book of Genesis (B'reshith in Hebrew).** – wikipedia.org

**BERESHIT RABBAH** (called also by the ancients Bereshit derabbi Osha'yah [Hosha'yah], Bereshit rabbah derabbi Oshaya [Hoshayah], Bereshit derabbi Hosha'yah rabba, Baraita derabbi Osha'ya) **Expository Midrash to the first book of the Pentateuch...** – Jewish Encyclopedia

**Midrash Rabbah - Genesis XIX:6 AND THEY SEWED THE LEAVES OF THE FIG (TE'ENAH) TOGETHER. R. Simeon b. Yohai said; That is the leaf which brought the occasion (to'anah)- for death-into the world. –**  
<http://www.betemunah.org/thetree.html>

**Midrash Rabbah - ...But because he had eaten of its fruit, the fig-tree opened its doors and received him, as it is written, And they sewed fig-leaves together, etc. (Gen. III, 7).** – <http://www.betemunah.org/thetree.html>

**What was the tree of which Adam and Eve ate? Rabbi Yosi says: It was the fig tree...the fig whereof he ate the fruit opened its doors and took him in.** (Midrash, Bereshith Raba, 15, 7). – quoted from Ernest L. Martin, Secrets of Golgatha, p. 258

**The fig leaf which brought remorse to the world.** (Midrash, Bereshith Raba, 15, 7). – quoted from Ernest L. Martin, Secrets of Golgatha, p. 258

**The tree of which the first man ate...Rabbi Nehemiah says: It was the fig, the thing wherewith they were spoilt, yet were they redressed by it. As it is said: And they stitched a fig-leaf.** (Berahot 40a, and see Sanhedrin 70a). – quoted from Ernest L. Martin, Secrets of Golgatha, p. 258

**I sought a leaf to cover up my nakedness and found none, for, when I ate, the leaves withered off every tree in my plot except for the fig, and from it I took leaves and it made me a girdle, even from the tree of which I ate. – The Book of Adam and Eve 20:5, –** quoted from Ernest L. Martin, Secrets of Golgatha, p. 258

The complete picture from Genesis is God visiting Adam and Eve in a garden. It was in the garden that God gave his instructions to Adam. And in that garden was a fig tree which ancient Jews thought was the tree of knowledge. After Adam and Eve ate the fruit of the tree of knowledge, which they were forbidden to eat, they then sowed the leaves of a fig tree together for clothes.

In light of these facts, details included in the gospel accounts take on additional significance. When he was in Jerusalem, Jesus spent a lot of time in a garden on the Mount of Olives where he often taught his disciples (John 18:2) (Such occasions include: the night of his arrest and his Olivet Discourse on eschatology.) In the area of that garden was a fig tree, which Jesus cursed because it had nothing to offer anyone. All its previous fruit had been eaten. Only its leaves were available to those who passed by.

Based on these observations we may conclude that the reason that Jesus cursed this fig tree (and the reason Matthew and Mark report this to us) was to provide an important illustration in connection with the sin of mankind. Essentially, Jesus is cursing the fig tree (which stands in for the tree of knowledge) and saying that no man should henceforth eat its fruit. And by extension, this account is another way of saying that men should sin no more.

Even more interesting is the fact that this all probably occurred in or near the same garden in which Christ was executed. In order to understand the additional connections between Christ's death and these events we must first look at more New Testament information regarding Jesus' crucifixion.

(For a discussion of the possible identification of the Tree of Life please see *Addendum Two: The Tree of Life.*)

### *Christ's Trial and the Location of the Sanhedrin*

As we continue with our discussion of the circumstances of Jesus' death we should also be aware of the relationship between his trial before the Sanhedrin and sacrificial precedent from the Law of Moses. As the gospels report, after he is arrested, Jesus is taken before the Sanhedrin. In New Testament times, the chambers of the Sanhedrin (or Jewish high court) were located within the Temple itself in a room adjacent to the Court of the Priests and the brazen altar where animals were regularly killed in sacrificial rituals. This room is identified in Talmudic accounts as the Chamber of Hewn Stone.

**Sanhedrin** – More correctly Sanhedrin (Gr. synedrion), meaning "a sitting together," or a "council." This word (rendered "council," A.V.) is frequently used in the New Testament #Mt 5:22 26:59 Mr 15:1 etc. to denote **the supreme judicial and administrative council** of the Jews...**As the highest court of judicature,** "in all causes and over all persons, ecclesiastical and civil, supreme," its decrees were binding, not only on the Jews in Palestine, but on all Jews

wherever scattered abroad. Its jurisdiction was greatly curtailed by Herod, and afterwards by the Romans. **Its usual place of meeting was within the precincts of the temple, in the hall "Gazith."** – Easton's Bible Dictionary

**Sanhedrin – Place of Meeting.** – **The meetings took place in one of the chambers of the Temple** in order that the discussions and decrees might thereby be invested with greater religious authority. **According to a passage in the Mekilta (Mishpatim, 4 [ed. Weiss, p. 87a]), the Sanhedrin, which was empowered to pass the sentence of capital punishment, sat "in the vicinity of the altar," i.e., in one of the chambers of the inner court of the Temple.** It was called "the hall of the βουλευταί" because the latter sat there. Subsequently it was called "lishkat parhedrin" = "the hall of the πρόεδροι" (Yoma 8b). **In this hall there was also a private room for the high priest** (Yoma 10a; Tosef., Yoma, i. 2). The βουλευταί or the πρόεδροι assembled in this private room (comp. Matt. xxvi. 57; Mark xiv. 63) before they met in the hall. – Jewish Encyclopedia

**Sanhedrin – In the Second Temple period, the Great Sanhedrin met in the Hall of Hewn Stones in the Temple in Jerusalem...The Sanhedrin met in a building known as the Hall of Hewn Stones (Lishkat Ha-Gazith), which has been placed by the Talmud and many scholars as built into the north wall of the Temple Mount, half inside the sanctuary and half outside, with doors providing access both to the Temple and to the outside....After the destruction of the Second Temple in 70, the Sanhedrin was re-established in Yavneh with reduced authority.** – wikipedia.org

**We are told that half of the Sanhedrin Hall was in the Court of the Israelites and half in the Court of the Priests (Middot 5:1, Sanhedrin 11:2, Yoma 25a.)** – Ernest L. Martin, The Secrets of Golgotha, p. 223

While the Jewish priests had private residences within the city of Jerusalem, during holy days (and weeks) the high priest himself and his assistant(s) resided in the Temple complex itself. This was necessary so that the priests would be purified and prepared to carry out the required Temple rituals.

**Leviticus 8:31 And Moses said unto Aaron and to his sons, Boil the flesh at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation: and there eat it with the bread that is in the basket of consecrations, as I commanded, saying, Aaron and his sons shall eat it. 32 And that which remaineth of the flesh and of the bread shall ye burn with fire. 33 And ye shall not go out of the door of the tabernacle of the congregation in seven days, until the days of your consecration be at an end: for seven days shall he consecrate you. 34 As he hath done this day, so the LORD hath commanded to do, to make an atonement for you. 35 Therefore shall ye abide at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation day and night seven days, and keep the charge of the LORD, that ye die not: for so I am commanded. 36 So Aaron and his sons did all things which the LORD commanded by the hand of Moses.**

It is for these reasons, that the Temple complex contained compartments suitable for the priests to live during their stay.

**John 14:2 In my Father’s house are many mansions (3438):** if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.

3438 μונה **mone**

from 3306; TDNT-4:579,581; n f

AV-mansion 1, abode 1; 2

1) a staying, abiding, dwelling, abode

2) to make an (one’s) abode

3) metaph. of the God the Holy Spirit indwelling believers

**In the Mishnah (the earliest part of the Talmud), it states that the residence of the High Priest was at or near the “Wood Chamber” located west of the Chamber of Hewn Stone (Middot 5:4) and next to the House of Abtinah (sometimes spelled Avtinah) where the incense was prepared for the Temple services. It was in the Upper Chamber of this “Temple House” that it is believed the House of the High Priest was located when he lived in his official residence upon the Temple Mount (*Encyclopedia Judaica*, vol. III.991). These “Houses” of the priests abutting to the Chamber of Hewn Stone (the Sanhedrin) were constructed on the second storey around and above a columned courtyard below. Remarkably, the New Testament states specifically that Jesus was taken into the Upper Chamber of the High Priest’s house while Peter had to stay below near the vestibule of the courtyard (Mark 14:66). This answers precisely to the description of the second storey residences for the High Priest (and other priestly dignitaries) which the Mishnah shows were supported by columns over a courtyard. These “Houses” were located just to the west and abutting to the Chamber of Hewn Stone (Tam. 1:1). – Ernest L. Martin, *The Secrets of Golgotha*, p. 223-224**

**The High Priest actually had more than one residence in Jerusalem. While it can be reasonably reckoned that he had a sumptuous home in the aristocratic region of Jerusalem on the southwest hill, he also had at least two other residences within the Temple itself in which he had to live at certain times of the year or when special sacrifices were offered. For example, when the High Priest was required to offer the Red Heifer, he had to precede the sacrifice by a stay of seven days in what was called the “House of Stone” at the northeastern corner of the Temple building (Parah 3:1). And also before the Day of Atonement, he had to reside seven days in his “Temple House” near the Chamber of the Hewn Stones (of which we have been speaking above) (Yoma 1:1). – Ernest L. Martin, *The Secrets of Golgotha*, p. 223-224**

**MISHNAH. Seven days before the Day of Atonement the High Priest was removed from his house to the cell of the counsellors and another priest was prepared to take his place in the case anything happened to him [the High Priest] that would unfit him [for the service]. GEMARA. We learned elsewhere: Seven days before the burning of the [red] heifers the priest who**



**was to burn the heifer was removed from his house to the cell in the north-eastern corner before the Birah.<sup>6</sup> It was called the cell of the stone chamber.<sup>7</sup>**  
 –Mas. Yoma 2a, the Talmud, Chapter 1, <http://halakhah.com/pdf/moed/Yoma.pdf>

Since, the events of Jesus' trial and death took place during the Passover festival, the high priest and his assistant(s) were residing in the Temple complex itself. After his arrest, Jesus was eventually taken to the Chamber of Hewn Stone to be tried by the Sanhedrin. (Though the gospel accounts may indicate he was first taken to the Temple residence of the high priest before his actual trial commenced in the official judicial chamber of the Sanhedrin.)

**Matthew 26:57 And they that had laid hold on Jesus led him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled...<sup>59</sup> Now the chief priests, and elders, and all the council (4892), sought false witness against Jesus, to put him to death;** <sup>60</sup> But found none: yea, though many false witnesses came, yet found they none. At the last came two false witnesses, <sup>61</sup> And said, This fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days. <sup>62</sup> And the high priest arose, and said unto him, Answerest thou nothing? what is it which these witness against thee? <sup>63</sup> But Jesus held his peace. And the high priest answered and said unto him, I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God. <sup>64</sup> Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven. <sup>65</sup> **Then the high priest rent his clothes, saying, He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses? behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy.** <sup>66</sup> **What think ye? They answered and said, He is guilty of death.** <sup>67</sup> Then did they spit in his face, and buffeted him; and others smote him with the palms of their hands, <sup>68</sup> Saying, Prophesy unto us, thou Christ, Who is he that smote thee?...**27:1 When the morning was come, all the chief priests and elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death:** <sup>2</sup> And when they had bound him, they led him away, and delivered him to Pontius Pilate the governor.

**Mark 14:53 And they led Jesus away to the high priest: and with him were assembled all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes.** <sup>54</sup> And Peter followed him afar off, even into the palace of the high priest: and he sat with the servants, and warmed himself at the fire. <sup>55</sup> **And the chief priests and all the council (4892) sought for witness against Jesus to put him to death;** and found none. <sup>56</sup> For many bare false witness against him, but their witness agreed not together. <sup>57</sup> And there arose certain, and bare false witness against him, saying, <sup>58</sup> We heard him say, I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands. <sup>59</sup> But neither so did their witness agree together. <sup>60</sup> And the high priest stood up in the midst, and asked Jesus, saying, Answerest thou nothing? what is it which these witness against thee? <sup>61</sup> But he held his peace, and answered nothing. Again the high priest asked him, and said unto him, Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed? <sup>62</sup> And Jesus said, I am: and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven. <sup>63</sup> **Then the high priest rent his**

clothes, and saith, **What need we any further witnesses? 64 Ye have heard the blasphemy: what think ye? And they all condemned him to be guilty of death.** 65 And some began to spit on him, and to cover his face, and to buffet him, and to say unto him, Prophesy: and the servants did strike him with the palms of their hands. 66 **And as Peter was beneath in the palace (833),** there cometh one of the maids of the high priest: **15:1 And straightway in the morning the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council, and bound Jesus, and carried him away, and delivered him to Pilate.**

**Luke 22:54 Then took they him, and led him, and brought him into the high priest's house.** And Peter followed afar off...66 **And as soon as it was day, the elders of the people and the chief priests and the scribes came together, and led him into their council (4892), saying,** 67 Art thou the Christ? tell us. And he said unto them, If I tell you, ye will not believe: 68 And if I also ask you, ye will not answer me, nor let me go. 69 Hereafter shall the Son of man sit on the right hand of the power of God. 70 Then said they all, Art thou then the Son of God? And he said unto them, Ye say that I am. 71 **And they said, What need we any further witness? for we ourselves have heard of his own mouth. 23:1** And the whole multitude of them arose, and led him unto Pilate.

**John 18:12** Then the band and the captain and officers of the Jews took Jesus, and bound him, 13 **And led him away to Annas first; for he was father in law to Caiaphas, which was the high priest that same year.** 14 **Now Caiaphas was he, which gave counsel to the Jews, that it was expedient that one man should die for the people.** 15 And Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple: that disciple was known unto the high priest, **and went in with Jesus into the palace (833) of the high priest.** 16 **But Peter stood at the door without.** Then went out that other disciple, which was known unto the high priest, and spake unto her that kept the door, **and brought in Peter...**24 **Now Annas had sent him bound unto Caiaphas the high priest...**28 **Then led they Jesus from Caiaphas unto the hall of judgment: and it was early; and they themselves went not into the judgment hall, lest they should be defiled; but that they might eat the passover.** 29 Pilate then went out unto them, and said, What accusation bring ye against this man? 30 They answered and said unto him, If he were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered him up unto thee. 31 **Then said Pilate unto them, Take ye him, and judge him according to your law. The Jews therefore said unto him, It is not lawful for us to put any man to death:...19:7** **The Jews answered him, We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God.**

833 αυλη **aule**

from the same as 109; ; n f

AV-palace 7, hall 2, sheepfold + 4163 1, fold 1, court 1; 12

1) among the Greeks in Homer's time, an uncovered space around the house, enclosed by a wall, in which the stables stood, hence among the Orientals that roofless enclosure by a wall, in the open country in which the flocks were herded at night, a sheepfold

2) **the uncovered courtyard of the house. In the O.T. particularly of the courts of the tabernacle and of the temple in Jerusalem.** The dwellings of the higher classes usually had two, one exterior, between the door and the street; the other interior, surrounded by the buildings of the dwelling itself. The latter is mentioned in #Mt 26:69.

3) the house itself, a palace

All of the gospels confirm that the Sanhedrin condemned Jesus to be put to death on the charge of blasphemy. As we have just seen, the Sanhedrin met in a room that was “half inside the sanctuary,” and in particular “half in the Court of the Priests,” “one of the chambers of the inner court of the Temple,” with a door providing access to the Temple and “in the vicinity of the altar.” Consequently, this death sentence was rendered by the high priests within the very location where many animals were brought to be killed and offered as sacrifices to God. Afterwards, the chief priests led Jesus to a location near the altar of burning on the Mount of Olives where the red heifer was killed and burned to ashes.

Additionally, this spot where Jesus was executed parallels the ritual patterns of other sacrificial animals besides the red heifer. Other sacrificial animals were actually killed by the priests in the court of the priests in the Temple itself and then their remains were taken to the altar of burning on the Mount of Olives. Jesus was condemned to death by the chief priests and elders within yards of the actual spot where these animals (including the Passover sacrifices) were killed by the priests during Temple rituals. Then Christ was taken by the chief priests to be executed in a site very close to where the bodies of those sacrificial animals were also destroyed.

As these events unfolded many Jewish pilgrims were travelling from all over Israel and the rest of the world to the Temple in order to have Passover lambs slaughtered in the area of the Temple very near to where Jesus was condemned by the Sanhedrin. As John 19:20 reports, many of these Jews entered the Temple courts from the east and passed directly by Jesus, the true Lamb of God, as he hung upon the cross near the location of the altar of burning where the red heifer was killed and where the bodies of other sacrificial animals were also destroyed.

It is true that most sacrificial animals were actually killed in the court of the priests within the Temple, while Jesus was only condemned to death there. However, Jewish tradition reckons Isaac to have been sacrificed by Abraham even though technically Isaac didn't actually die. Likewise, Jewish tradition reveres Isaac's willingness to give his life as the basis upon which all sacrifices are accepted before God.

According to ancient Jewish theology, **the atoning efficacy of the *Tamid* offering [the fixed, daily offering], of all the sacrifices in which a lamb was immolated, and perhaps, basically, of all expiatory sacrifice irrespective of the nature of the victim, depended upon the virtue of the Akedah [the binding of Isaac], the self-offering of that Lamb whom God had recognized as the perfect victim of the perfect burnt offering.** 272 – Brown, *Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus*, Volume 2, Theological Objections, p. 159-160

66. Vermes also notes that the **“blood of the Binding of Isaac” is mentioned four times in the early Jewish midrash** called the Mekhilta of Rabbi Ishmael. In Exodus 12:13, God promise the Israelites that when he passed through the land to destroy the firstborn sons of the Egyptians, he would pass over the houses of the Israelites who had applied the blood of the Passover lambs to the lintels and doorposts of their houses. **The midrash interprets the verse to mean, “And when I see the blood, I will pass over you’ – I see the blood of the Binding of Isaac.”** God wasn’t looking at the blood of the lambs, he was looking at the blood of Isaac.

67. **This same thought is also carried over in a prayer still included in the additional service for the Jewish New Year (Rosh Hashanah), which culminates with the words, “Remember today the Binding of Isaac with mercy to his descendants.”** We are forgiven through the merit of the sacrifice of Isaac! **The rabbis even taught that the final resurrection of the dead would take place “through the merits of Isaac, who offered himself upon the altar”** (Pesikta deRav Kahana, 32). – Brown, *Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus*, Volume 2, Theological Objections, p. 160

**'Akedah, ("The binding or sacrifice of Isaac"):** - **This Biblical incident plays an important part in the Jewish liturgy.** The earliest allusion to it in prayer occurs in the Mishnah (Ta'anit, ii. 4) in the litany for public fast-days, "May He who answered Abraham on Mount Moriah listen to our supplication." In the Gemara (R. H. 16a) the use of a ram's horn on New-year's Day is explained as a reminder of the ram which was offered in place of Isaac. Hence the following passage was inserted in the musaf arranged by Rab in the third century (Zunz, "S. P." p. 81; B. Beer, "Leben Abraham's," p. 186) for that day (see Gen. R. lvi.; Lev. R. xxxvi.): "Remember in our favor, O Lord our God, the oath which Thou hast sworn to our father Abraham on Mount Moriah; **consider the binding of his son Isaac upon the altar when he suppressed his love in order to do Thy will with a whole heart! Thus may Thy love suppress Thy wrath against us, and through Thy great goodness may the heat of Thine anger be turned away from Thy people, Thy city, and Thy heritage! . . . Remember to-day in mercy in favor of his seed the binding of Isaac.**" – Jewish Encyclopedia

If Isaac’s life can be counted to have been sacrificed on the altar even though he actually was not killed then certainly Christ’s being condemned to death by the chief priests in the court where sacrificial animals were slain can likewise be considered as Christ “dying” in accordance with the sacrificial deaths prefigured by these animals. This is all the more reasonable given that Christ was actually killed very near the location where the red heifer itself was killed and where the bodies of the sacrificed animals were also destroyed. If Isaac’s binding and not actually being sacrificed is sufficient to merit God’s forgiveness and the acceptance of the animal offerings required by the law, then certainly Christ’s actual death in the precise locations used in Mosaic ritual can claim the same effect and significance.

In the case of Christ, we have exact parallels to Mosaic ritual, while in the case of Isaac we only have a prefiguring (though clearly Christ's death mirrors Isaac's death as well). There is also a parallel in terms of general location. Both men were offered on one of the mountains in the area of Jerusalem somewhere near the location of the Temple.

**Genesis 22:2** And he said, **Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains** which I will tell thee of.

**2 Chronicles 3:1** Then **Solomon began to build the house of the LORD at Jerusalem in mount Moriah**, where the LORD appeared unto David his father, in the place that David had prepared in the threshingfloor of Ornan the Jebusite.

In the case of Christ, we actually have the chief priests figuratively “killing” him by issuing a death sentence for him in the exact vicinity where sacrificial animals were killed in the Temple. And then we have them escort Jesus to an area near the altar on the Mount of Olives where the red heifer itself was killed and where the bodies of sacrificial animals were destroyed. At that location, some of the chief priests were present and presided over the death of Christ.

In this way, Christ clearly becomes the Lamb that God provided in place of Isaac and in fulfillment of the Passover.

**Genesis 22:8** And Abraham said, **My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering:** so they went both of them together.

**John 1:29** The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, **Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world...<sup>36</sup> And looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God!**

**1 Corinthians 5:7** Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. **For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us.**

### *Roman Crucifixion and the Greek Words for “Cross”*

We have already seen that the New Testament provides us with the location of Jesus' death: a garden on the Mount of Olives somewhere near the altar of burning. And we know that Jesus was executed by means of crucifixion. What deserves further attention is the object that Christ was crucified upon. Conventionally, it is thought that Jesus was crucified on a wooden post. However, a look at the available biblical and historical information as well as ancient Christian and Jewish documents invite us to reconsider this conventional conclusion. Our examination of these issues will span the next two sections.

The most common New Testament Greek word that is used to refer to the object upon which Jesus was crucified is “stauros” (4716.) This Greek word “stauros” is used 28 times in the New Testament in reference to Jesus’ crucifixion. Both Jesus himself and Paul frequently speak of Christ’s crucifixion using the Greek word “stauros.” The New Testament always translates “stauros” as “cross.”

4716 σταυρος **stauros**

from the base of 2476; TDNT-7:572,1071; n m

AV-cross 28; 28

1) a cross

1a) **a well known instrument of most cruel and ignominious punishment, borrowed by the Greeks and Romans** from the Phoenicians; to **it were affixed** among the Romans, down to the time of Constantine the Great, the guiltiest criminals, particularly the basest slaves, robbers, the authors and abettors of insurrections, and occasionally in the provinces, at the arbitrary pleasure of the governors, upright and peaceable men also, and even Roman citizens themselves  
1b) the crucifixion which Christ underwent

It is certainly true that the Romans crucified people using a wooden post. (By “post,” we simply mean an upright piece of cut wood or plank that functions as the vertical support for a crucifixion.) So, it is conceivable that the conventional understanding (that Christ was crucified on such a wooden post) is valid. But despite the fact that the New Testament states that Jesus was crucified on a “stauros,” there are several reasons preventing us from concluding that this means he was crucified on a wooden post.

The first reason is that the Romans didn’t always use wooden posts to crucify people. Sometimes, they crucified people to trees. In fact, it is believed that the practice of crucifixion originally involved hanging someone from a tree. In the quotes below note the similarities between Christ’s execution and the procedures discussed even as the articles remark that the Romans sometimes crucified people using trees rather than wooden posts.

**Crucifixion – The Greek and Latin words corresponding to "crucifixion" applied to many different forms of painful execution, from impaling on a stake to affixing to a tree, to an upright pole (a crux simplex) or to a combination of an upright (in Latin, stipes) and a crossbeam (in Latin, patibulum).**[6] **In some cases, the condemned was forced to carry the crossbeam on his shoulders to the place of execution. A whole cross would weigh well over 300 pounds (135 kilograms), but the crossbeam would not be quite as burdensome, weighing around 75–125 pounds (35–60 kilograms).**[7] **The Roman historian Tacitus records that the city of Rome had a specific place for carrying out executions, situated outside the Esquiline Gate,**[8] **and had a specific area reserved for the execution of slaves by crucifixion.**[9] **Upright posts would presumably be fixed permanently in that place, and the crossbeam, with the condemned person perhaps already nailed to it, would then be attached to the post.** – wikipedia.org

**Crucifixion – crucifixion hanging on a cross**, in ancient times a method of capital punishment . It was practiced widely in the Middle East but not by the Greeks. **The Romans, who may have borrowed it from Carthage, reserved it for slaves and despised malefactors. They used it frequently, as in the civil wars and in putting down the Jewish opposition. Crucifixion was probably at first a modification of hanging on a tree or impaling on a pole, and from such a connection come the synonyms tree and rood (i.e., rod or pole) for Jesus' cross.** – Columbia Encyclopedia

**Crucifixion** – The Roman penal code recognized this cruel penalty from remote times (Aurelius Victor Cæsar, 41). **It may have developed out of the primitive custom of "hanging" ("arbori suspendere") on the "arbor infelix,"** which was dedicated to the gods of the nether world. Seneca ("Epistola," 101) still calls the cross "infelix lignum." **Trees were often used for crucifying convicts** (Tertullian, "Apologia," viii. 16)...**It was this cross-beam, not the heavy stake, which the condemned was compelled to carry to the scene of execution** (Plutarch, "De Sera Num. Vind." 9; Matt. ib.; John xix. 17; See Cross)...**Death was probably caused by starvation or exhaustion,** the cramped position of the body causing fearful tortures, and ultimately gradual paralysis. Whether a foot-rest was provided is open to doubt; but usually the body was placed astride a board ("sedile"). **The agony lasted at least twelve hours, in some cases as long as three days. To hasten death the legs were broken, and this was considered an act of clemency** (Cicero, "Phil." xiii. 27). **The body remained on the cross, food for birds of prey until it rotted, or was cast before wild beasts. Special permission to remove the body was occasionally granted.** Officers (carnifex and triumviri) and soldiers were in charge. – Jewish Encyclopedia

**Crucifixion – The hypothesis that the Ancient Roman custom of crucifixion may have developed out of a primitive custom of arbori suspendere— hanging on an arbor infelix (unfortunate tree) dedicated to the gods of the nether world—is rejected by William A. Oldfather, who shows that this form of execution (the supplicium more maiorum, punishment in accordance with the custom of our ancestors) consisted of suspending someone from a tree, not dedicated to any particular gods, and flogging him to death.[51] Tertullian mentions a 1st-century AD case in which trees were used for crucifixion,[52] – wikipedia.org**

Writing at around the year 200 AD, the early Christian apologist Tertullian cites specific incidents in which the Romans crucified criminals on trees as late as 125 or 126 AD during the proconsul of Tiberius over the Roman province of Africa.

That I may refute more thoroughly these charges, I will show that in part openly, in part secretly, practices prevail among you which have led you perhaps to credit similar things about us. Children were openly sacrificed in Africa to Saturn **as lately as the proconsulship of Tiberius, who exposed to public gaze the priests suspended on the sacred trees overshadowing their temple-so many crosses on which the punishment which justice craved overtook their crimes, as the**

**soldiers of our country still can testify who did that very work for that proconsul.** – Tertullian, Apology, Chapter IX

**Tiberius Avidius Quietus** – Quietus came from a wealthy, distinguished and well connected political family in Faventia (modern Faenza, Italy)... Quietus was made governor of Roman Britain in 97 and held the post until 100. He also served at an unknown date being the Proconsul of Achaia... **Quietus married an unnamed Roman woman and had a son a younger Tiberius Avidius Quietus. The younger Avidius Quietus was suffect consul in 111, Proconsul of Asia and Proconsul of the Africa Province in 125 or 126.** – wikipedia.org

Elsewhere Tertullian reports that it was common for Romans to affix Christians to trees.

So that it is, indeed, a mighty consolation to us who are punished for these gods, to find them suffer the like with us, before they come to be worshipful; **for Christians are fastened to crosses and stumps of trees;** and have you ever an image that has not been so applied in its formation? It is upon a frame of wood in the form of a gibbet where the body first takes its degree of divinity. Our Christian sides are torn with nails; but how is every member of your poor gods mauled with hatchets, saws, and files? – Tertullian, Apology, Chapter XII

**Give us now what names you please from the instruments of cruelty you torture us by;** call us Sarmenticians and Semaxians, **because you fasten us to trunks of trees,** - Tertullian, Apology, Chapter L

Likewise, Hippolytus, writing around 200-235 AD, reports that several of the apostles were themselves crucified on trees by the Roman state in the first century.

**Saint Hippolytus of Rome** – Saint Hippolytus of Rome, (born c. 170—died c. 235, Sardinia; Western feast day August 13, Eastern feast day January 30), Christian martyr... – wikipedia.org

**2. Andrew preached to the Scythians and Thracians, and was crucified, suspended on an olive tree,** at Patr, a town of Achaia; and there too he was buried. – Hyppolytus, Hippolytus on the Twelve Apostles

These two belonged to the seventy disciples who were scattered [2030] by the offence of the word which Christ spoke, "Except a man eat my flesh, and drink my blood, he is not worthy of me." [2031] **But the one being induced to return to the Lord by Peter's instrumentality, and the other by Paul's, they were honoured to preach that Gospel [2032] on account of which they also suffered martyrdom, the one being burned, and the other being crucified on an olive tree.** – Hyppolytus, Hippolytus on the Seventy Apostles

Smith's Bible Dictionary provides an interesting note on this point. After explaining that crucifixion was practiced by the Egyptians, Smith's refers to



Genesis 40:19 as support. Genesis 40:19 is the account of Joseph interpreting the dream of the Pharaoh's baker. As the dream foretold, the baker was later hung on a tree.

**Crucifixion – Crucifixion was in use among the Egyptians, Gen. 40:19.** – Smith's Bible Dictionary.

**Genesis 40:19 Yet within three days shall Pharaoh lift up thy head from off thee, and shall hang (08518) thee on a tree (06086);** and the birds shall eat thy flesh from off thee. 20 And it came to pass the third day, which was Pharaoh's birthday, that he made a feast unto all his servants: and he lifted up the head of the chief butler and of the chief baker among his servants. 21 And he restored the chief butler unto his butlership again; and he gave the cup into Pharaoh's hand: 22 **But he hanged (08518) the chief baker: as Joseph had interpreted to them.**

Just as was the case when the earlier cultures crucified people on trees, when the Romans crucified people on trees, the tree itself served as the "stauros." The conclusion that "stauros" could refer to any object upon which someone was hung or affixed is supported by the fact that the related Greek verb "staroo" (4717) essentially means "staking something to something else." On this note, it makes perfect sense to see "staroo" defined in part as "crucify" since that particular form of execution involved nailing (or staking) someone to a tree or post.

4717 σταυρωω **stauroo**

from 4716; TDNT-7:581,1071; v

AV-crucify 46; 46

1) **to stake, drive down stakes**

2) to fortify **with driven stakes**, to palisade

3) **to crucify**

3a) to crucify one

3b) metaph. to crucify the flesh, destroy its power utterly (the nature of the figure implying that the destruction is attended with intense pain)

In fact, the Greek word "stauros" (4716) is itself derived from the Greek verb "histemi" (2476) which simply means "to stand up."

**Crucifixion of Jesus – Shape of gibbet** – Whereas most Christians believe the gibbet on which Jesus was executed was the traditional two-beamed cross, **debate exists regarding the view that a single upright stake was used. Part of the debate has centered around the ambiguity of the Greek and Latin words used in the earliest Christian writings. The Koine Greek terms used in the New Testament are stauros (σταυρός) and xylon (ξύλον). The word stauros, comes from the Greek root "sta" meaning to stand.[76] Historically it referred to a sacrificial post, and may have also referred to a cross.[76] The words stauros and (ana)stayroo may not definitively determine the shape of the gibbet.** [77][78][79] – wikipedia.org

2476 ἵστημι **histemi**

a prolonged form of a primary  $\sigma\tau\alpha\omega$  stao stah'-o (of the same meaning, and used for it in certain tenses); TDNT-7:638,1082; v

AV-**stand 116**, set 11, establish 5, stand still 4, stand by 3, misc 17, vr stand 2; 158

1) **to cause or make to stand**, to place, put, set

1a) to bid to stand by, [set up]

1a1) in the presence of others, in the midst, before judges, before members of the Sanhedrin;

1a2) to place

1b) to make firm, fix establish

1b1) to cause a person or a thing to keep his or its place

1b2) to stand, be kept intact (of family, a kingdom), to escape in safety

1b3) to establish a thing, cause it to stand 1b31) to uphold or sustain the authority or force of anything

1c) to set or place in a balance

1c1) to weigh: money to one (because in very early times before the introduction of coinage, the metals used to be weighed)

**2) to stand**

2a) to stand by or near

2a1) to stop, stand still, to stand immovable, stand firm

2a1a) of the foundation of a building

2b) to stand

2b1) continue safe and sound, stand unharmed, to stand ready or prepared

2b2) to be of a steadfast mind

2b3) of quality, one who does not hesitate, does not waiver

The wikipedia quote above uses the term gibbet which simply refers to an object upon which criminals were hung. As the quote below explains a gibbet can refer to a gallows, a wooden post, or a tree.

**Gibbet – A gibbet (pronounced /'dʒɪbɪt/) is a gallows-type structure from which the dead bodies of executed criminals were hung on public display to deter other existing or potential criminals...Public crucifixion with prolonged display of the body after death can be seen as a form of gibbeting. Old Testament (Torah) law forbids gibbeting beyond sundown of the day that the body is hung on the tree. (See Deuteronomy 21:22-23.) – wikipedia.org**

We can see then that to crucify (“staroo”) someone on a cross (“stauros”) simply conveyed that they were being put to death by being nailed to some upright (standing) object. And, as the quote from wikipedia below notes, neither the New Testament itself nor the Greek word “stauros” tell us anything about the exact shape of the object upon which Jesus (or anyone else) was crucified. And, as we have seen, the Romans crucified people to trees as well as wooden posts of varying shapes.

**Crucifixion – At times the gibbet was only one vertical stake**, called in Latin crux simplex.[17] This was the simplest available construction for torturing and killing the condemned. **Frequently, however, there was a cross-piece attached**

**either at the top to give the shape of a T (crux commissa) or just below the top, as in the form most familiar in Christian symbolism (crux immissa).[18] Other forms were in the shape of the letters X and Y. The New Testament writings about the crucifixion of Jesus do not speak specifically about the shape of that cross, but the early writings that do speak of its shape, from about the year 100 on, describe it as shaped like the letter T (the Greek letter tau)[19] or as composed of an upright and a transverse beam, sometimes with a small ledge in the upright.[20] – wikipedia.org**

These biblical and historical facts prevent us from simply making assumptions about the object upon which Christ was crucified. Furthermore, the New Testament provides instances where “stauros” refers only to the crossbeam to which Jesus’ hands were nailed and not to the vertical object to which this crossbeam was attached.

All four gospels report that Jesus was forced to carry his “stauros” (4716) to the place of his execution. He was aided in this task by Simon of Cyrene.

**Matthew 27:32 And as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name: him they compelled to bear his cross (4716).**

**Mark 15:21 And they compel one Simon a Cyrenian, who passed by, coming out of the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to bear his cross (4716).**

**Luke 23:26 And as they led him away, they laid hold upon one Simon, a Cyrenian, coming out of the country, and on him they laid the cross (4716), that he might bear it after Jesus.**

**John 19:17 And he bearing his cross (4716) went forth into a place called the place of a skull, which is called in the Hebrew Golgotha: 18 Where they crucified him, and two other with him, on either side one, and Jesus in the midst.**

As the quotes from Jewish Encyclopedia and wikipedia explain, it was the crossbeam only (and not the vertical post) that criminals were forced to carry to the site of their execution. An entire crossbeam and post structure would have weighed in excess of 300 lbs. However, the crossbeam itself only weighed 75 to 125 lbs. This weight, while still heavy and very difficult to carry, would have been manageable.

**Crucifixion** – The Greek and Latin words corresponding to "crucifixion" applied to many different forms of painful execution, from impaling on a stake to affixing to a tree, to an upright pole (a crux simplex) or to a combination of an upright (in Latin, stipes) and a crossbeam (in Latin, patibulum).[6] **In some cases, the condemned was forced to carry the crossbeam on his shoulders to the place of execution. A whole cross would weigh well over 300 pounds (135 kilograms), but the crossbeam would not be quite as burdensome, weighing around 75–125 pounds (35–60 kilograms).**[7] – wikipedia.org

**Crucifixion** – The act of putting to death by nailing or binding to a cross. Among the modes of Capital Punishment known to the Jewish penal law, crucifixion is not found; the "hanging" of criminals "on a tree," mentioned in Deut. xxi. 22, was resorted to in New Testament times only after lapidation (Sanh. vi. 4; Sifre, ii. 221, ed. Friedmann, Vienna, 1864). A Jewish court could not have passed a sentence of death by crucifixion without violating the Jewish law. **The Roman penal code recognized this cruel penalty from remote times (Aurelius Victor Cæsar, 41). It may have developed out of the primitive custom of "hanging" ("arbori suspendere") on the "arbor infelix,"** which was dedicated to the gods of the nether world. Seneca ("Epistola," 101) still calls the cross "infelix lignum." **Trees were often used for crucifying convicts (Tertullian, "Apologia," viii. 16)... It was this cross-beam, not the heavy stake, which the condemned was compelled to carry to the scene of execution (Plutarch, "De Sera Num. Vind."** 9; Matt. ib.; John xix. 17; See Cross)... **Death was probably caused by starvation or exhaustion,** the cramped position of the body causing fearful tortures, and ultimately gradual paralysis. Whether a foot-rest was provided is open to doubt; but usually the body was placed astride a board ("sedile"). The agony lasted at least twelve hours, in some cases as long as three days. To hasten death the legs were broken, and this was considered an act of clemency (Cicero, "Phil." xiii. 27). The body remained on the cross, food for birds of prey until it rotted, or was cast before wild beasts. Special permission to remove the body was occasionally granted. Officers (carnifex and triumviri) and soldiers were in charge. – Jewish Encyclopedia

Using this historical information we can see that Matthew 27:32, Mark 15:21, Luke 23:26, and John 19:17 all use the Greek word "stauros" (4716) to refer to the crossbeam and not to a wooden post. The varied use of the Greek and Latin words, the history of crucifixion, and the historical reports about the variety of object upon which criminals were hung by the Romans all prevent us from simply assuming that the New Testament intended for us to conclude that Jesus was nailed to an upright wooden post. We will see additional biblical evidence that "stauros" does not necessarily refer to a wooden post as we continue in the next section.