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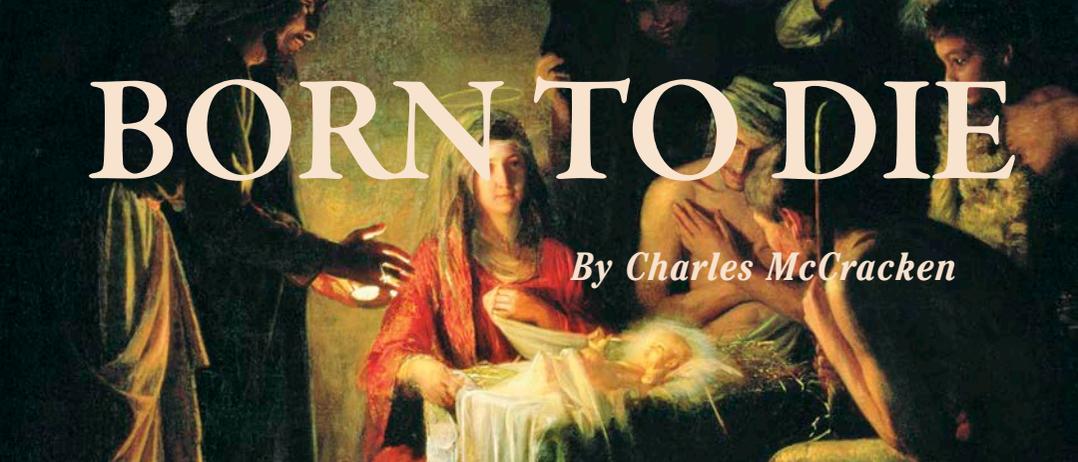
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BORN TO DIE

By Charles McCracken



It was a mother's worse nightmare—hanging between two criminals on a Roman cross was her son, Jesus. Together in the aberrant darkness watching the horror of the crucifixion, Mary stood with her sister Salome, sister-in-law Mary the wife of Clopus and Mary of Magdala.¹

Some thirty-three years earlier as Mary presented her infant Son to the Lord, a man named Simeon accurately predicted the anguish she now felt:

Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against (yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed (Lk. 2:34-35).

Messiah's death was not the abrupt end to a promising career, a botched PR strategy, or a cruel twist of fate. Although virtually incomprehensible, God used the evil intent of depraved humanity to carry out His purpose. That God would allow Messiah to be born and crucified by wicked men seems totally incongruous. Yet, the One laid in the rustic manger of Bethlehem and lauded by angels at His birth was destined to die the most humiliating and excruciating death imaginable. From our perspective, it seems to be a paradox; from God's, it is the key to His plan of redemption.



Prophesied in the Torah—the Law

Following the original sin of Adam and Eve, God began outlining His plan of redemption. Replacing fig leaf aprons Adam and Eve contrived to hide their nakedness, God made coats from animal skins. The fur coats necessitated the death of an innocent substitute that covered their shame and depicted the blood sacrifice required as atonement for sin (Gen. 3:21).

The Bible stresses the importance of God's sacrificial requirement when Abel and His brother Cain brought offerings to the Lord. Clearly, they understood the need for a blood sacrifice of, "a particular animal, a lamb; a particular lamb, the firstling; and a particular part of the lamb, the fat."² Believing he had liberty to reinterpret God's instruction, Cain brought a vegetarian offering, which God rejected. Abel offered, *the firstborn of his flock*, and the Scriptures reveal, *the Lord respected Abel and his offering* (Gen. 4:4).

The institution of Passover reinforced the necessity for a substitutionary sacrifice. The slaughter of the Passover lamb required no bones be broken and its blood painted on the doorposts of each home. God promised, *when I see the blood, I will pass over you* (Ex. 12:13). Successive generations memorialize the fact that on the first Passover, the blood of the lamb was shed so the firstborn of Israel could live.

The Mosaic Law explicitly reasserts that atonement for sin requires the shedding of blood, *For the life of the flesh is in the blood...for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul* (Lev. 17:11).

It is no coincidence John the Baptist introduced Jesus as, *The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world* (Jn. 1:29). As an eyewitness of the crucifixion, the Apostle John also drew the connection between Passover and that horrific event when he wrote,

But when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs. But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out. For these things were done that the Scripture should be fulfilled, "not one of His bones shall be broken". And again another Scripture says, "They shall look on

Him whom they pierced" (Jn. 19:33-34; 36-37; cf. Ex. 12:46).

Prophesied in the Nevi'im—the Prophets

John quoted from the book of Exodus and the Messianic prophecy of Zechariah who predicted, *then they will look on Me whom they pierced* (Zech. 12:10). The Hebrew word translated "pierced" describes the action of thrusting someone through with a spear or sword.³ Interestingly, Zechariah speaks of a still future event in which the inhabitants of Jerusalem will look on Him, their Messiah, whom they pierced.

While functioning as chief wise man in Persia, Daniel received revelation foretelling Messiah's death. Beginning with a royal decree to rebuild the ruined city of Jerusalem, the revelation outlined 70 weeks of years. After 69 of those prophetic weeks or 483 years, Messiah would present Himself to the nation of Israel and then be, *cut off, but not for Himself* (Dan. 9:26). The Hebrew word translated "cut off"



means "to destroy".⁴ At the precise time predicted, Jesus unmistakably identified Himself as Messiah by riding into Jerusalem on the foal of a donkey; within the week, He was crucified or "cut off" (Zech. 9:9).

The Scriptures clearly foretell Messiah's death, and Isaiah explains why. The 53rd chapter speaks unmistakably of Messiah, asserting,

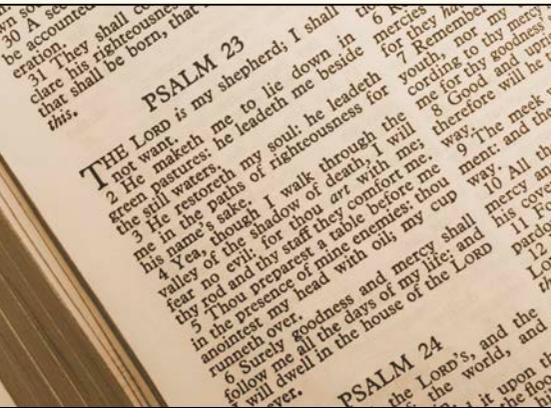
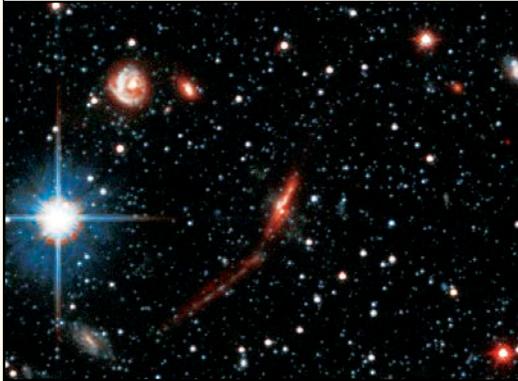
But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all (Is. 53:5-6).

The substitutionary nature of Messiah's death is obvious.

For He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of My people He was stricken. Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief... an offering for sin (Is. 53:8, 10).

The sin offering always died as a substitute for the sinner (Lev. 5).

foreshadowed the Ultimate Sacrifice. Quoting from this Psalm, the author of Hebrews emphasizes, *Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me.* (Heb. 10:5). Messiah's sacrifice on behalf of sinful humanity would not be an animal, but rather His own body.



Graphic in it's portrayal of Messiah's suffering, the details of Psalm 22, written at least 1000 years earlier, mesh precisely with the record of the crucifixion in the gospels. The words, *They divide My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots*, were literally fulfilled when soldiers gambled for His clothing (Ps. 22:18; cf. Mt. 27:35). *I am poured out like water... all My bones are out of joint... My tongue clings to My jaws... they pierced My hands and My feet*, are phrases consistent with the shameful and agonizing death of crucifixion (Ps. 22:14,15,16). Even the words, *My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?*, quoted by the Lord shortly before His suffering ended on the cross, reinforce the Messianic reference in this Psalm (Ps. 22:1).

Prophesied in the Kethuvim—the Psalms

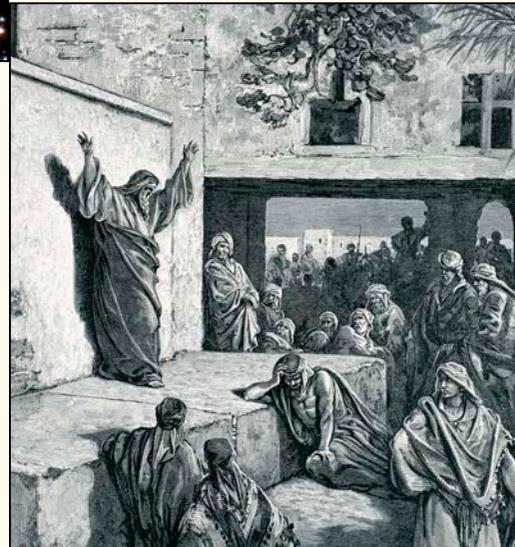
While the law emphasized the need for atonement, the 40th Psalm explains the inability of ceremonial sacrifice to satisfy God's justice (Ps. 40:6-8). God never accepted or desired animal sacrifices for their own sake, but only as they

Planned in the foreknowledge of God

"[T]here is no point in human history where divine sovereignty and human responsibility, or free will, come into more vivid juxtaposition than they do in the crucifixion of Christ".⁵ Peter

documents this tension declaring that Jesus was delivered to His executioners according to the, *determined purpose and foreknowledge of God* and that they carried out what, [God's] *hand and [God's] purpose determined before to be done* (Acts 2:23; 4:28). He later taught Messiah's substitutionary sacrifice was, *foreordained before the foundation of the world* (1 Peter 1:18-20).

Celebrating the Passover with His disciples the night before His crucifixion, Jesus alluded to His divine appointment when He said, *truly the Son of Man goes as it has been determined* (Lk. 22: 22). That this was no fatalistic call of destiny, but a plan in which He participated by choice was confirmed earlier when He told His disciples,



No one takes [my life] from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father (Jn. 10:18).

Predicted by Jesus

At Caesarea Philippi, more than six months prior to His final visit to Jerusalem and on the heels of

Peter's confession of faith, Jesus began warning He would, *suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day* (Mt. 16:21). During His transfiguration, He conversed with Moses and Elijah concerning His impending death in Jerusalem (Lk. 9:30-31;44). On His final journey to Jerusalem, He emphatically stated that religious leaders would, *condemn Him to death, and deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock and to scourge and to crucify* (Mt. 20:19).

Portrayed in Micah's Prophecy

It is possible that even the Lord's birth pictured His sacrificial death. On the night of His nativity, an angel appeared to the shepherds, *out in the fields keeping watch over their flocks by night*, and instructed them saying, *you will find the babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger* (Lk. 2:8,12).

The shepherds immediately responded, *let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing which has come to pass, which the Lord has made known unto us* (Lk. 2:15).

Micah, the prophet who foretold Messiah's birth in Bethlehem, also prophesied, *And thou, O tower of the flock [Heb., Migdal Eder], the stronghold of the daughter of Zion, unto thee shall it come, even the first dominion; the kingdom shall come to the daughter of Jerusalem* (Mic. 4:8 AV).

Although obscure and often overlooked, Micah discloses that Messiah, who embodied the hope of the Kingdom, "was to be revealed from Migdal Eder; the tower of the flock".⁶

Interestingly, history documents that Migdal Eder, located in the northern part of Bethlehem was a watch-tower built for the protection of Temple flocks.⁷ It is also significant that during lambing season, Temple flocks were brought from the fields to this location with the lower level functioning as the birthing room for sacrificial



Endnotes

- ¹ Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus The Messiah*, (Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.), 888-889.
- ² John Walvoord, *Series in Christology—Part 4: The Preincarnate Son of God* <http://www.bible.org/page.php?page_id=5441>
- ³ James Strong, “daqar”, *Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1890)
- ⁴ Strong, “karat”
- ⁵ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), 3:48.
- ⁶ Edersheim, 131
- ⁷ Ibid.
- ⁸ Jimmy DeYoung, Jimmy’s Prophetic Perspective on the News <http://prophecytoday.com/news/archive/2005_12_23_archive.php>

Cover image and top of page 2: Manger Scene; Page 6, Shepherds in the Field, Carl H. Bloch/HopeGallery.com/originals: Frederiksborg Castle, Denmark. Page 2, Page 4: top, NASA, ESA and T.M. Brown (STScI). Page 5: Micah exhorting the Israelites. Other images, FOI Gospel Ministry image archive.

lambs. A prominent Bible teacher points out that Temple shepherds routinely wrapped newborn lambs in, “swaddling clothes to keep the new lambs from spot and blemish”, placing them in a manger, “until they calmed down”.⁸

With people swarming Bethlehem, guestrooms filled to capacity and Mary close to giving birth, the Tower of the Flock she and Joseph passed entering the city could have been an option for shelter and seclusion. If Mary and Joseph took refuge in Migdal Eder, it may very well be that in the actual lambing room for sacrificial lambs, Mary, brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger (Lk. 2:7).

The sheer volume of revelation in the Bible clearly establishes Messiah was born to die. Following His resurrection, Jesus Himself explained,

Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ [Messiah] to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem (Lk. 24:46-47 emphasis added).

Charles McCracken is the Canadian Director and a conference speaker for FOI Gospel Ministry in Brampton, Ontario.



*The Babe in the manger
was God’s only Son
Who came to the world to die,
The Babe in the manger
could never have done
The work of His God on High.
The Babe left the manger
and went to the cross
To Pay the wages of sin.
Your way of forgiveness
is not by the Babe,
But the Christ
Who died for your sin.*

W.S. & Mildred Dillon



*May the joy
of Christmas
be yours throughout
the coming year!*



*From your friends
at the FOI Gospel Ministry office*

