

**ENDTIME ISSUES NEWSLETTER No. 121:  
“The Passion of Christ in Scripture and History”  
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The writing of this newsletter began on Tuesday, November 2, 2004—an important day in American history as well as in my personal life. On this day Americans went to polling stations in unprecedented numbers to cast their vote for the new President. Personally I went to the printer to deliver the manuscript of my new book *THE PASSION OF CHRIST IN SCRIPTURE AND HISTORY*.

A common denominator between the two events is the completion of a major endeavor. For the two presidential candidate, November 2 represents the termination of months of crisscrossing the country delivering speeches to win votes. For me November 2 represents 10 months of painstaking research into the history and theology of the Passion of Christ. Before commenting on the significance of this book and posting an excerpt from chapter 3, I will make a few observations on the presidential campaign.

Since I could not vote because my naturalization process is not yet completed, I took time to listen and observe the amazing optimism displayed by many Americans during the presidential campaign. Most Americans seem to believe that by electing the right president, problems such as terrorism, unemployment, economic recession and the alarming federal debt, will be readily resolved.

Frankly, I admire the persistent optimism of the American people—an optimism that has long disappeared in old European countries, like Italy. Most Italians, for example, have lost faith in the political process. The reason is simple. For the past 2000 years they have been governed by Emperors, Princes, Dukes, Barbarian tribes, Popes, and now corrupt politicians. All the forms of governments Italians have experienced, whether autocratic or democratic, have proven to be corrupt, inefficient, and greedy. This has given rise to a prevailing pessimism expressed in a popular saying: “Ammazza, ammazza, sono tutti una razza—You can kill

them all, because they are all of the same breed.” Incidentally, Italians use the term “politician” to refer to crooks. Saying to a person, “you are a politician” is a veiled way to say: “You are a crook.”

Fortunately, most Americans do not share this pessimism characteristic of old European countries. Belonging to a young nation, Americans are still able at election time to pin their hope in a new president who promises to resolve all the domestic and international problems. I have been amazed at the confidence and boldness with which the presidential candidates promoted their utopic agenda. For example, they boldly promise to eradicate terrorism, even while the daily news report the constant escalation of terroristic acts, especially in Iraq.

### **The Roots of Terrorism**

Most Americans, including the newly reelected President Bush, seem to ignore that terrorism cannot be defeated only by military might. The reason is that Moslem terrorists are inspired by the teachings of the Koran to sacrifice their life as martyrs to fight the infidels, especially the Americans. Capturing and killing a few terrorists in different parts of the world, will hardly solve the problem of terrorism. The reason is that among the 1.3 billion Moslems there are constantly new recruits willing to sacrifice their life in fighting the infidels. After all, dying in fighting the infidels, is the surest way to reach immediately Paradise.

In ENDTIME ISSUES No. 85, “Violence in the Bible and the Koran,” I have shown that Islam is a violent religion because the Koran teaches holy warfare (Jihad) to force people to submit to its religious/political system. A most compelling proof of the violent nature of Islam is provided by the example of Muhammad’s immediate successors, known as Califs. They followed his intense fanaticism in waging relentless wars of conquests against Christians, Jews, and pagans. In a relatively short time they carved an enormous empire for themselves. At the height of their power, the Muslims’ territories stretched from northern Africa and southern Europe in the West to the borders of modern India and China in the East. Their battle cry was: “Before you is paradise, and behind you are death and hell.”

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A religion that resorts to violence to force its teachings upon others, can hardly be called a “religion,” because a true religion presupposes reverence for God and respect for fellow-beings. It would be more appropriate to label violent religions as “terroristic organizations.”

The designation of “terroristic organization” applies not only to Islam, but also to Christian churches that became violent during certain periods of history. For example, during the Middle Ages the Catholic Church became a formidable “terroristic organization” that organized crusades to exterminate Muslims, Jews, and so-called “heretics.” Catholic church leaders terrorized innocent people in Western Europe, especially through the inquisition. The latter was a travelling court that went from town to town seeking out for “heretics” to interrogate, torture, and have executed by civil courts if they did not abandon their beliefs.

Recently the Pope apologized for the past terroristic activities of his Catholic church and has repudiated the use of violence to advance Catholicism. But, to my knowledge, no Muslim Iman has dared to condemn and reject the teaching of the Koran on the use of sword to destroy the infidels. The result is that devout Muslims who take the teachings of the Koran seriously, as inculcated in their conscience by their religious leaders, as willing to die as martyrs to commit senseless acts of terrorism.

My point is that unless religious and political leaders of all nations and persuasions come together to address the roots of terrorism by condemning as evil and immoral the teachings of the Koran on the use of violence, and unless Muslim religious leaders are willing to repudiate such teachings (like the Pope did for the Catholic church), terrorism is here to stay. In fact, I have reasons to believe that contrary to President Bush’s promise to win the war on terrorism, terroristic activities against the American people and their institutions, will intensify in the coming years. Lately books and articles have been published by knowledgeable people indicating that the worst acts of terrorism are still to come.

Americans are the special target of Muslim terrorists, because they perceive the United States to be the strongest Christian country in the world. Thus, it poses the greatest threat to the Moslem’s religious and political ideologies. Western European countries pose less of a threat to the

Moslem's agenda, because the Christian faith in Western Europe has largely disappeared.

Adventists who look at current events from a prophetic perspectives, can hardly share President Bush's optimism to restore security and prosperity to America and the rest of the world during the next four years. The signs of the End given by Jesus and clarified by New Testament writers, call for an intensification of warfare, natural disasters, moral perversion, and economic crises as we draw nearer to the End. In my book *THE ADVENT HOPE FOR HUMAN HOPELESSNESS* I devote over 100 pages to a detailed analysis of these signs.

As Adventists we know that no president can restore security and prosperity to United States or to the rest of the world, because we are fast moving toward the final showdown, called in the Bible "the Great Tribulation" (Matt 24:21; Rev 7:14). Thus, our attitude should be realistic. On the one hand we must support all the initiatives designed to "hold back the winds of strife" (Rev 7:1), so that the Gospel may reach sincere people in every corner of the earth. But on the other hand we must never loose sight of the fact that we are drawing close to the end when "lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold" (Matt 24:12). The solution to the problems that afflict mankind today, is not the election of a new American President, but the coming of Christ to establish a new world of peace and righteousness. We cannot vote for Christ's coming, but we can hasten the day by preparing ourselves and others for that climactic event (2 Peter 3:12).

### **AN UPDATE ON THE RELEASE OF *THE PASSION OF CHRIST IN SCRIPTURE AND HISTORY***

It is hard for me to describe the release and exhilaration I felt on November 2, when I delivered the manuscript of *THE PASSION OF CHRIST IN SCRIPTURE AND HISTORY* to the printer. The experience is not new, since I have published 16 books before. But I become so passionate involved in every new research project, that when I see its completion I rejoice as it were the arrival of a new baby. Incidentally, it took me nine months to research and write this book, that is, the gestation time for a baby. My wife can testify that this past year she has seen little

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of me, as I was either away for weekend seminars, or hiding in my office to work on this manuscript an average of 16-17 hours a day.

It is with a deep sense of gratitude to God that I am announcing the release by November 17, 2004 of *The Passion of Christ in Scripture and History*. The printer has promised to give priority to this project in order to deliver me the books by November 17. The reason is that on November 18, I will be flying to England for a rally in Manchester on November 19-21 and London on November 26-27. I look forward to take copies of the book with me on the plane to offer to our fellow believers in England.

As a subscriber to this newsletter, you can also be among the first people to receive a copy of this timely book. By ordering it now you will receive your copy as soon as the book comes out of the press. The simplest way is to order it online by clicking [here](#). If you have a problem ordering the book online, feel free to call us at (269) 471-2915. We will take your order by phone and mail you the book immediately.

### **Why a Book on *The Passion of Christ in Scripture and History***

Somebody emailed me a message suggesting that I am wasting my time writing a book that exposes the unbiblical elements and teachings of Mel Gibson *The Passion of the Christ*. After all, most movies are not documentaries. They are largely based on fiction, not on facts. I would like to respond to this observation by mentioning two facts.

First, the major reason for writing this book is not merely to critique Gibson's movie, but to lead people to a fresh appreciation of the centrality, necessity, and achievements of the Cross. In *The Passion of the Christ*, Gibson makes no attempt to address the fundamental question: Why was it necessary for Christ to suffer and die for our salvation? His sole objective is to portray the relentless brutal torture of Christ from the time of His arrest until His death. But, many are asking, Did Christ need to be tortured unto death to satisfy the demands of a punitive God? Did Christ pay the penalty of our sins through the intensity of His sufferings or through His sacrificial death?

These questions are especially relevant today when the presence of sin and the need of a Savior are largely dismissed as outmoded concepts. A vindictive and punitive portrayal of a God who allows His Son to be tortured unto death can only play into the hands of skeptics who find the notion of forgiveness through the vicarious cruel suffering and death of an innocent victim to be a perversion of justice.

These important questions are examined at length in the last chapter of my book, which is the longest and in many ways the most important part of the study. The chapter investigates the necessity, the achievement, and the benefits of Christ's death for our life today.

A second reason for devoting part of my book to an examination of Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*, is the fact this movie is not an ordinary film which is soon forgotten. It is a major cultural event whose influence that will be felt for a long time. Millions of people have viewed the film, making it one of the biggest blockbusters in history. The movie will be replayed over and over, especially during the season of Lent and Easter.

Over four million copies of the DVD versions of the movie were sold in the USA at the time of its release in August 2004. This film will promote fundamental Catholic beliefs such as the brutal sufferings of Christ to satisfy the demands of a punitive God, the co-redemptive role of Mary, suffering as a way to salvation, the reenactment of Christ's sacrifice at the Mass, the demonic impersonations of Satan, and the collective responsibility of the Jews for the death of Christ.

In view of the important impact the film will continue to have in promoting fundamental Catholic beliefs, it is imperative to examine carefully the claims made concerning its accuracy. The viewing public must be given the information needed to determine what is biblical and what is unbiblical in Gibson's portrayal of Christ's Passion.

### **Gibson's Claims of Biblical Accuracy**

Mel Gibson's movie *The Passion of the Christ* is heralded by numerous Catholic and Protestant church leaders as the most authentic reenactment of the last twelve hours of Jesus' life. To add biblical and

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historical authenticity to the movie, Gibson has the characters dressed to reflect the time, and speaking Aramaic and Latin. A major theme in the film's publicity has been its faithfulness to Scripture.

In an interview with *Christianity Today*, Gibson said: "Wow, the Scripture are the Scriptures—I mean they're unchangeable, although many people try to change them. And I think that my first duty is to be as faithful as possible in telling the story so that it doesn't contradict Scriptures. Now, so long as it didn't do that, I felt that I had a pretty wide berth for artistic interpretation, and to fill in some of the spaces with logic, with imagination, with various other readings."

In an interview with Diane Sawyer on ABC News' *Primetime*, Gibson was asked whether he considered his film to be "the definitive depiction of the Passion." He replied: "This is my version of what happened according to the Gospels and what I wanted to show—the aspects of it I wanted to show." The issue is not the sincerity of Gibson's *claims* about the faithfulness of his movie to the Gospels, but whether his production, *The Passion*, validates his claim.

### **Catholic Leaders Attest the Accuracy of *The Passion***

Numerous Catholic and Protestant church leaders support Gibson's claim of biblical accuracy. Vatican officials have openly endorsed *The Passion*, obviously because it effectively promotes fundamental Catholic beliefs. The film was shown to members of the Vatican Secretariat of State, the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. All of them expressed unanimous approval, praising it as the most accurate reenactment of Christ's Passion ever produced.

For example, Archbishop John Foley, President of Pontifical Council for Social Communications, said: "I don't think there would be well-founded criticisms because all the material in the film comes directly from the Gospel accounts. There's nothing in the film that doesn't come from the Gospel accounts. So, if they're critical of the film, they would be critical of the Gospel."<sup>5</sup> Similarly, Vatican spokesman Joaquin Navarro-Valls describes the movie as "a cinematographic transposition of the historical events of the Passion of Jesus Christ according to the Gospel."

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### Protestant Leaders Attest the Accuracy of *The Passion*

Many Protestant church leaders have joined the Catholics in enthusiastically promoting *The Passion* as a biblical masterpiece. For example, Ted Haggard, President of the National Association of Evangelicals, said in an interview: “This film is probably the most accurate film historically than anything that has ever been made in the English world . . . So we have no hesitations. We were watching it for biblical accuracy and we thought it was as close as you can get.”

Rick Warren of the Saddleback Church in Southern California purchased 18,000 tickets because he believes that the movie is “Brilliant, biblical—a masterpiece . . . It is not just a dramatization. It’s a historic description.” Similarly, Jack Graham, President of the Southern Baptist Convention, affirmed: “The movie is biblical, powerful and potentially life-changing.”

Bill Hybels of Willow Creek, Robert Schuller of Crystal Cathedral, James Dobson of Focus on the Family, and radio commentator Paul Harvey, just to name a few, have all endorsed the film as an unprecedentedly truthful reenactment of Christ’s Passion which is supposed to result in mass conversions to Christianity.

### Scholars Question the Biblical Accuracy of *The Passion*

The enthusiastic endorsement of *The Passion* by numerous Catholic and Protestant church leaders stands in stark contrast with the reviews by biblical scholars who have taken time to compare the script of *The Passion* with the Gospels’ accounts of Christ’s suffering and death. These scholars express serious concerns over major biblical and historical errors present in the movie.

In the forthcoming book I cite several scholarly reports. For the sake of brevity I will only mention the symposium prepared by team of leading international scholars. They were invited to contribute chapters to a symposium which analyzes different aspects of *The Passion*. The title of the symposium is *Jesus and Mel Gibson’s THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST: The Film, the Gospels and the Claims of History*. The aim of the symposium is to help readers appreciate *The Passion* more fully by understanding the differences between the Passion of the Gospels and the



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Passion of the movie. Some of the chapters praise the artistic qualities of *The Passion* and defend Gibson's artistic interpretation of the Gospel narratives.

Kathleen E. Corley and Robert L. Webb, editors of the symposium, summarize the findings of the investigation, first by acknowledging that *The Passion* is faithful to the Gospels' basic outline of the "betrayal, arrest, examination, flogging, crucifixion." However, they continue, noting that the movie departs from the Gospels in several crucial areas. They write: "Much of the film does not represent accurately either the Gospels or history. At other times, the flashbacks are wholesale creations—all entirely legitimate in an artistic creation, but not given the claims of 'accuracy.' In crucial areas the story of *The Passion* takes considerable licence with the Gospels narratives. The film adds scenes that have no basis in the Gospels' plot, and considerably alters the characterization of many of its key characters."

### **Why Bible Scholars Disagree with Popular Preachers?**

How can we account for the radical difference in the evaluation of *The Passion* between reputable Bible scholars and brand-name preachers? A plausible explanation is the fact that pastors are so busy with their pastoral obligations that they do not have time to engage in a time-consuming comparative analysis of the script of *The Passion* with the narratives of the Gospels. Thus, pastors tend to express their *feelings*, rather than their *findings*.

By contrast, scholars usually do their homework before publishing their *findings*, because they wish to protect their credibility. A Latin proverb says: *Verba volant, scriptum manet*—"Words fly, the writing remains." Most of the words uttered by preachers from a pulpit are soon forgotten, but what is published cannot be erased. It can haunt the author for long time.

At the time of the release of Gibson's movie, a few Adventist preachers delivered a series of sermons on THE PASSION OF CHRIST, extolling the faithfulness of Gibson's movie to the Scripture. I heard some of the recorded sermons, and I was greatly distressed by some of the inaccurate statements. I concluded that it would be unfair to evaluate a sermon as if it were the presentation of a scholarly paper.

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Pastors have an extremely busy schedule which hardly allows them blocks of time for indepth research. Often they end up expressing their *feelings* rather than their *findings*. Thus, let us be tolerant when we hear a preacher saying things that are inaccurate. After all, even the presidential candidates made inaccurate statements during the debates. After each debate it was interesting to listen to the critics who listed all the factual errors made by each candidate. But, in the case of sermons, the only critical response usually occurs around the Sabbath dinner table.

### **An Overview of *THE PASSION OF CHRIST IN SCRIPTURE AND HISTORY***

Most people want to know what a is book about before deciding to invest their time and money in it. Out of consideration for these people, I briefly summarize the content of each chapter. Hopefully, this summary will wet the appetite for reading the rest of the book.

**Chapter 1** on “The Passion Plays in History” looks at Gibson’s movie from a historical perspective. By tracing the historical origin and theological developments of the Passion Play, one can understand how these plays, especially Gibson’s *The Passion*, became a dramatic and visible portrayal of fundamental Catholic beliefs and piety.

**Chapter 2** on “The Theology of the Passion Play” builds upon the historical survey of Chapter 1 by focusing on six major unbiblical Catholic beliefs that have become embedded in Passion Plays during the past seven centuries. These beliefs masterfully portrayed in *The Passion*, represent fundamental Catholic teachings which historically Protestants have largely rejected.

**Chapter 3** on “The Passion of Christ according to Mel Gibson” examines Gibson’s portrayal of the Passion in the context of the Gospels’ narratives. It addresses fundamental questions: Does the movie truly reflect the biblical accounts of Christ’s suffering and death? Or is the movie largely drawn from Catholic legends and mystical literature that grossly distort the nature and meaning of Christ’s atoning sacrifice? The conclusion of the investigation is abundantly clear: Gibson has produced a strict Catholic film with a distinctive Catholic message derived from Catholic legends and superstitious beliefs.

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**Chapter 4** on “The Cross of Christ” moves from Gibson’s portrayal of the Passion to an investigation of the biblical teachings regarding the centrality, necessity, and achievements of the Cross. The study shows that the Cross has both a *subjective* and an *objective* dimension. *Subjectively*, through the Cross God revealed the depth of His love in being willing to offer His Son for undeserving sinners.

*Objectively*, the Cross reveals how God dealt with the objective reality of sin, not by minimizing its gravity, but by revealing its costliness in assuming its penalty. God did not cause His Son to suffer the harsh punishment portrayed in Gibson’s movie to meet the demands of His own justice, but was willing through His Son to become flesh and suffer the punishment of our sins in order to redeem us without compromising His own character.

To understand the achievements of the Cross, I have examined in their socio-historical content the following five word pictures: propitiation, redemption, justification, reconciliation, and intercession. These word pictures take us from the sacrifices in the Temple court (propitiation), to the price paid for the manumission of the slaves in the marketplace (redemption), to a law court where a judge pronounces an accused person “not guilty” (justification), to the renewal of relationships with family and friends (reconciliation), to Christ’s ministry in the heavenly sanctuary (intercession). These word pictures represent partial attempts to capture glimpses of the significance and value of Christ’s death for our present life and future destiny.

### **The Content of this Newsletter**

This newsletter contains an excerpt of Chapter 3 of *THE PASSION OF CHRIST IN SCRIPTURE AND HISTORY*. This chapter examines Gibson’s portrayal of the Passion in the context of the Gospels’ narratives. Fundamental questions must be addressed: Does the movie truly reflect the biblical accounts of Christ’s suffering and death? Or is the movie largely drawn from Catholic mystical literature that grossly distorts the nature and meaning of Christ’s atoning sacrifice?

In view of the fact that Gibson has repeatedly admitted to have derived many details from Emmerich’s visions recorded in *The Dolorous*

*Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ*, our aim is to ascertain to what extent her visions are faithful to the Gospels. Do her visions help us today to understand the true meaning of Christ's suffering and death?

The procedure I follow is simple. I examine Emmerich's influence on *The Passion* by looking at the following five episodes in the context of the Gospel narratives:

1. The Portrayal of Mary, the Mother of Jesus
2. The Portrayal of Judas
3. The Portrayal of Satan
4. The Scourging and Crucifixion of Jesus
5. The Portrayal of the Jews

For the sake of brevity, in this newsletter I will post only a section of part 4, dealing with "The Scourging and Crucifixion of Jesus." Footnote references also are omitted to save space. The full text with the footnote references are found in the book.

#### **A THANK YOU NOTE**

Thank you also for sharing my newsletters with your friends. As a result of your efforts, I receive an average of 200 new subscriptions every week. Let your friends know that this is a FREE service. To subscribe they only need to email a message to <[sbacchiocchi@biblicalperspectives.com](mailto:sbacchiocchi@biblicalperspectives.com)>, saying SUBSCRIBE ME.

#### **A METHODIST PASTOR/PROFESSOR FROM SINGAPORE VISITING ANDREWS UNIVERSITY**

Last year when I presented my seminars in Singapore, Pastor Noel Goh, a Methodist pastor and professor at the Methodist Seminary, attended the meeting. Incidentally, the Methodist Church is the largest Christian denomination in Singapore with about 60,000 members. Pastor Goh responded very favorably to the message of the Sabbath. In fact, he offered to take me and our local pastor to lunch at a country club to share with us some of his new found truths, including the Sabbath.

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During the meal, Pastor Goh expressed his interested to visit Andrews University this year in conjunction with his sabbatical. He wants to become better acquainted with the message and mission of our Adventist church. I extended him a warm invitation, without realizing that he meant what he said.

Last Sabbath Pastor Goh arrived to our campus and is currently attending some of the classes at the seminary and spending time reading in the library. I invited him for lunch twice and we plan to get together few more times before he leaves. Pastor Goh told me yesterday that he has been greatly blessed by the warm reception and challenging teachings of some professor. He likes the place and the people so much that he is thinking of spending three weeks on our campus, instead of two, as originally planned.

In one class on the Sanctuary by Roy Gane, Ph. D., Old Testament Professor, he was thrilled to hear much of what he had developed on his own. In fact, he allowed me to download in my computer his brilliant PowerPoint presentation on the Sanctuary. I plan to use portions of it in future presentations.

Pastor Goh told me that in Singapore there is a circle of ministers, including the Anglican bishop who attended my meetings, who are eager to recover the biblical roots of the Christian faith, including the Sabbath. I look forward in a future visit to Singapore to become better acquainted with these church leaders. Let us remember them in our prayers.

## **LIST OF ANNOUNCEMENTS AND SPECIAL OFFERS**

### **APPEARANCE ON 3ABN ON DECEMBER 9, 2004**

3ABN has extended me an official invitation to present the highlights of my forthcoming book *THE PASSION OF CHRIST IN SCRIPTURE AND HISTORY* on Thursday evening, December 9, 2004 during the two hours popular live program. I look forward with great anticipations to this unique opportunity to help viewers around the world to better understand, not only the Catholic heresies embedded in Gibson's movie, but the biblical view of the Passion of Christ, as His passionate love to redeem us from the *penalty* (Gal 3:13) and the *power* of sin (Titus 2:14) through His sacrificial death.

Last week I spoke to a rally of a dozen of Ghananian congregations in Reggio Emilia, Italy. When I told them about the live presentation of this research on 3ABN on Thursday December 9, they told me that they plan to organize a special meeting at their church to downlink and view this presentation. In the next newsletters I will give you all the details about the time when this special live program can be viewed in different countries.

### ***SPECIAL OFFER ON THE PASSION OF CHRIST IN SCRIPTURE AND HISTORY***

On November 17, 2004, *THE PASSION OF CHRIST IN SCRIPTURE AND HISTORY* (208 pages), will come off the press. You will be proud to own this book and to share it with your friends. The book *THE PASSION OF HIS LOVE* by Ellen White sold at WALL-MART, is an inspiring meditation on Christ's suffering and death, but it hardly helps people to recognize the Catholic heresies embedded in Gibson's movie. In fact, even some Adventist pastors have said that the two are the same, which is not true.

By contrast, *THE PASSION OF CHRIST IN SCRIPTURE AND HISTORY*, helps people distinguish between what is biblical and what is unbiblical in Gibson's portrayal of Christ's Passion. More important still, the book explains the difference among the Catholic, Protestant, and Adventist understanding of the redemptive accomplishments of the Cross.

To make it possible for many to benefit from this timely study, we offer the book until December 31, 2004, at the followings introductory offers:

ONE COPY: \$20.00 postage paid.

TWO COPIES: \$30.00 postage paid

TEN COPIES: \$100.00 postage paid

THIRTY COPIES (one case): \$150.00, postage paid.

By offering the book by the case of 30 copies for only \$150.00, postage paid, the price for single copies is only \$5.00, instead of \$20.00.

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You can order copies online at my website: ----- or click here. If you have a problem ordering copies through my website, just email us your order or call us at (269) 978-6878 or (269) 471-2915. We will be glad to take your order and mail you the book immediately.

### **UPCOMING WEEKEND SEMINARS**

As a service to our subscribers, I am listing at my website the and the location of the upcoming seminars for the month October 2004. Every Sabbath it is a great pleasure for me to meet subscribers who travel considerable distances to attend the seminars. For a listing of the time and places of my seminars, visit my website at <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/seminars.html>

### **SPECIAL OFFER ON HITACHI LCD PROJECTORS**

If your church or school are looking for a outstanding L projector, especially the forthcoming NET 2004, you will be pleased to learn that the HITACHI Corporation of North America has agreed to offer to our Adventist churches and schools their line of projectors at over 65% discount on the factory suggested retail price. Over 500 Adventist churches and schools have already purchased these outstanding projectors.

HITACHI has just come out with two new projectors with lens shift and four interchangeable lenses. Their model are HITACHI CP-X1200 3500 lumens and HITACH CP-X1250 4500 lumens. The shift lenses makes it possible to place the projector on a side wall or even on the ceiling behind the beams. The four optional lenses make it possible to place the projector from 10' to 150' away from the screen. Call me for details. I am in the process of negotiating a special price for our churches.

Read the rest of the story about the special offer on HITACHI projectors at my website: <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/projector.html>. If you have a problem accessing my website, just email us your enquiry or call us at (269) 978-6878 or (269) 471-2915. We will be glad to give you all the information about the special HITACHI offer.

### **SPECIAL ONETIME OFFER ON CD-ROMS AND DVD/VIDEO RECORDINGS**

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Because of the continuous demand from many countries for CD-ROMS and DVD/VIDEO recordings, we decided to extend the SPECIAL ONE TIME OFFER until December 31, 2004. The TWO CD-ROM contain all my research (over 7000 pages) and all my PowerPoint Lectures. The FIVE DVD DISKS contain 10 live PowerPoint lectures of my SABBATH/ADVENT seminars, that were taped last January by a TV crew at Andrews University.

The special offer is ONLY \$100.00, postage paid, instead of regular price of \$350.00. Read the details at my website: <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/Promotions/SPECIALPACKAGEOFFER.htm>. If you have a problem ordering the package through my website, just email us your order or call us at (269) 978-6878 or (269) 471-2915. We will be glad to take your order by phone and mail you the package immediately.

### **SPECIAL ONETIME OFFER ON ALL MY 17 VOLUMES**

A number of subscribers who prefer reading books, rather than watching or listening to my recordings, have asked me if I would consider making a special onetime offer on the complete package of my 16 books. I thought that this was a legitimate request.

**THIS IS THE SPECIAL ONETIME OFFER:** Between now and December 31, 2004, you can order the complete package of all the 17 volumes I have authored on our fundamental Adventist beliefs, for only \$120.00, mailing expenses included, instead of their regular price of \$325.00. This means that you are paying only \$7.00 per book, instead of the regular price of \$20.00 per book. The package includes the new book *THE PASSION OF CHRIST IN SCRIPTURE AND HISTORY*.

These 17 volumes represent for 30 years of painstaking research on our fundamental Adventist beliefs. You can see the picture of each book and read sample chapters at my website: If you have a problem ordering the 17 books package through my website, just email us your order or call us at (269) 978-6878 or (269) 471-2915. We will be glad to take your order and mail you the book immediately.



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**THE BEST SDA COMMENTARY ON REVELATION**

Many pastors, Bible teachers, and lay members, have expressed their gratitude for informing them about the best SDA commentary on the Book of Revelation, recently published by Andrews University Press. If you missed the previous announcement, be sure to contact us to order your copy. We will mail it to you immediately.

Much of the prophetic message and mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church derives from the Book of Revelation. Yet until now, most of the Adventist commentaries on Revelation were produced by authors who had a limited understanding of the linguistic, historical, political, and social settings of the book. Finally, our Adventist Church has published a Commentary on the Book of Revelation, that provides a wealth of information needed to unlock the meaning of problematic passages.

The author is Ranko Stefanovic, Ph. D, currently serving as Professor of New Testament at Andrews University. The publisher is Andrews University Press. Prof. Stefanovic spent two years producing this popular commentary, drawn from his doctoral dissertation presented with distinction at the Andrews University Theological Seminary.

You can read the full story at my website: <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/Promotions/RevelationofJesusChrist.htm>. If you have a problem ordering the book through my website, just email us your order or call us at (269) 978-6878 or (269) 471-2915. We will be glad to take your order and mail you the book immediately.

**AN INTERACTIVE MULTIMEDIA CD-ROM OF THE GREAT CONTROVERSY**

Have you ever wished that you could see the unfolding of the Great Controversy during the history of Christianity? This has been the dream of Gerard Damsteegt, Ph. D., Professor of Church History at our Andrews University Theological Seminary. With the help of competent people who worked with him during the past 8 years and the generous contribution of supporters who believed in this project, Damsteegt has produced a CD-ROM that will thrill your soul and enrich your mind.

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## **THE SCOURGING AND CRUCIFIXION OF JESUS**

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It seems to be a mark of our age that we do not believe something to be realistic unless it is brutal. Judged by the graphic portrayal of the relentless brutal torture inflicted on Christ's body, *The Passion* is very realistic. It achieves Gibson's goal of showing what real scourging and crucifixion must have been like. In an interview with Peter J. Boyer of the *New Yorker*, Gibson said: "I wanted to bring you there. I wanted to be true to the Gospels. That has never been done before. I didn't want to see Jesus looking really pretty, I wanted to mess up one of his eyes, destroy it."

Since there is nothing said in the Gospels about Jesus' eye being destroyed, did Gibson succeed in making the movie absolutely true to the Gospels, as "has never been done before"? None of the evangelists depicts Jesus with a destroyed eye. In fact, their description of Jesus' scourging and crucifixion are as minimal as the writers could make it. "Having scourged Jesus, Pilate delivered him to be crucified." "When they came to the place which is called The Skull, there they crucified him." A dozen verses later Jesus is dead. This is the extent of the Gospels' account. By

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contrast, *The Passion* portrays for two hours the vivid and excruciating details of the scourging, flogging, and crucifixion of Christ.

### **Excessive and Relentless Brutality**

A common criticism of many reviewers is the excessive and relentless brutality of *The Passion* that goes far beyond the succinct accounts of the Gospels. Apparently it was not difficult for Gibson to brutalize Jesus' body, because he is a master of cinematic violence. *Newsday* says that "the film shows that the *Braveheart* star and director is skilled at depicting violence . . . with grisly, horrific details of Christ's physical mutilation and torment."

Jeff Strickler writes in the *Star Tribune*: "As much as 'The Passion of the Christ' has been ballyhooed as a religious film, it is, above all, a Mel Gibson movie. Sure, the Oscar-winning director of *Braveheart* slips in a little dogma [too much in my view], but what he really lays on your face is brutality. Blood splatters. Skin rips open. Eyes swell shut. Gibson's thesis is that Jesus suffered for people's sins, and his focus is on the suffering."<sup>42</sup> Surprisingly, the words "suffering" and "passion" (*pathein* in Greek) do not occur in the Gospels, because the focus is not on the intensity of Christ's suffering, but on the nobility of Christ's sacrificial death.

Similar criticisms of the excessive brutality of *The Passion* have appeared in major newspapers. Writing for the *New York Times*, A. O. Scott notes that "*The Passion of the Christ* is so relentlessly focused on the savagery of Jesus' final hours that this film seems to arise less from love than from wrath, and to succeed more in assaulting the spirit than in uplifting it. Mr. Gibson has constructed an unnerving and painful spectacle that is also, in the end, a depressing one."

Ty Burr writes in the *Boston Globe*: "A profoundly medieval movie, Yes. Brutal almost beyond powers of description, Yes. More obsessed with capturing every holy drop of martyr's blood and sacred goblet of flesh than with any message of Christian love, Yes. More than anything, *The Passion of the Christ* seems to be exactly the movie Mel Gibson wanted to make as an abiding profession of his traditionalist Catholic faith. On that score it is a success."

I fully agree with Burr. Gibson has done a masterful job in producing a brutal and gory reenactment of Christ's Passion in full accordance with his traditional Catholic faith. To bring into sharper focus

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the contrast between the Gospels' accounts of Christ's sufferings and death and the exaggerated brutality of Gibson's movie, we will compare what these two sources have to say regarding five major episodes:

1. The Physical Abuse of Jesus at the Arrest
2. The Mocking of Jesus before the High Priest
3. The Scourging of Jesus before Pilate
4. The Procession to Calvary
5. The Crucifixion Scene

These five episodes are the most brutal and shocking parts of the movie. Since the brutality portrayed in the movie is largely derived from Emmerich's *The Dolorous Passion*, the text of the latter will be compared with the Gospels' account. The influence of *The Dolorous Passion* on Gibson's movie cannot be overestimated. Anyone who has a doubt should read the book alongside the Gospels after having seen the film. It soon becomes evident that *The Dolorous Passion* was used by Gibson as the underlying script for the shooting of the film.

### **The Physical Abuse of Jesus at the Arrest**

In *The Passion*, the abusive treatment of Christ begins in the opening scene at His arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane. In the Gospels there is no detailed description of any binding of Jesus. John only tells us: "The band of soldiers and their captain and the officers of the Jews seized him and bound him" (John 18:12). The other Gospels do not mention any binding at all, but only that ". . . they laid hands on him and seized him" (Mark 14:46).

But Gibson ignores the Gospels, choosing instead to portray the detailed description of Christ's binding given in *The Dolorous Passion*. We quoted earlier Emmerich's description of how Jesus was tied like a sausage with ropes around his neck, arms, waist, and legs to allow the soldiers to drag Christ "from side to side in the most cruel manner."

The physical abuse of Jesus increased while the temple soldiers escorted Him to the chief priests. When they reached a bridge, the soldiers threw Him off a bridge, and it was only His chain jerking taut that arrested His fall. Such a scene is not found in the Gospel accounts. Its source is *The Dolorous Passion*: "I saw our Lord fall twice before he reached the bridge, and these falls were caused entirely by the barbarous manner in which the

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soldiers dragged him; but when they were half over the bridge they gave full vent to their brutal inclinations, and struck Jesus with such violence that they threw him off the bridge into the water, and scornfully recommended him to quench his thirst there. If God had not preserved him, he must have been killed by this fall; he fell first on his knee, and then on his face, but saved himself a little by stretching out his hands.”

In *The Passion*, the scene of Christ’s examination before the chief priest shows common people being awakened in the middle of the night and paid to go to witness against Christ. No such scene is found in the Gospels. Emmerich provided Gibson this information: “They hastened to all the inns to seek out those persons whom they knew to be enemies of our Lord, and offered them bribes in order to secure their appearance. But, with the exception of a few ridiculous calumnies, which were certain to be disproved as soon as investigated, nothing tangible could be brought forward against Jesus.”

In the following chapter Emmerich says: “The customary prayers and preparations for the celebration of the festival being completed, the greatest part of the inhabitants of the densely-populated city of Jerusalem, as also the strangers congregated there, were plunged in sleep after the fatigues of the day, when, all at once, the arrest of Jesus was announced, and every one was aroused, both his friends and foes, and numbers immediately responded to the summons of the High Priest, and left their dwellings to assemble at his court.” This scene is foreign to the Gospels, which tell us that “the chief priests and the whole council sought false testimony against Jesus that they might put him to death, but they found none” (Matt 26:59-60; Mark 14:55).

### **The Mocking of Jesus before the High Priest**

The Gospel account of the abusive treatment Christ received before the Court of Caiaphas is very brief: “They all condemned him as worthy of death. Then some began to spit at him; they blindfolded him, and struck him with their fists, and said, ‘Prophecy!’ And the guard took him and beat him” (Mark 14:64-65; cf. Matt 26:67).

By contrast, *The Dolorous Passion* describes in detail the gruesome methods used to torture Christ in the Court of Caiaphas—methods shown in the movie, but absent in the Gospels. “No sooner did Caiaphas, with the other members of the Council, leave the tribunal

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than a crowd of miscreants—the very scum of the people—surrounded Jesus like a swarm of infuriated wasps, and began to heap every imaginable insult upon him. Even during the trial, whilst the witnesses were speaking, the archers and some others could not restrain their cruel inclinations, but pulled out handfuls of his hair and beard, spat upon him, struck him with their fists, wounded him with sharp-pointed sticks, and even ran needles into his body; but when Caiaphas left the hall they set no bounds to their barbarity. They first placed a crown, made of straw and the bark of trees, upon his head, and then took it off, saluting him at the same time with insulting expressions, like the following: ‘Behold the Son of David wearing the crown of his father.’

“Next they put a crown of reeds upon his head, took off his robe and scapular, and then threw an old torn mantle, which scarcely reached his knees, over his shoulders; around his neck they hung a long iron chain, with an iron ring at each end, studded with sharp points, which bruised and tore his knees as he walked. They again pinioned his arms, put a reed into his hand, and covered his Divine countenance with spittle. They had already thrown all sorts of filth over his hair, as well as over his chest, and upon the old mantle. They bound his eyes with a dirty rag, and struck him, crying out at the same time in loud tones, ‘Prophecy unto us, O Christ, who is he that struck thee?’ He answered not one word, but sighed, and prayed inwardly for them.

“After many many insults, they seized the chain which was hanging on his neck, dragged him towards the room into which the Council had withdrawn, and with their sticks forced him in, vociferating at the same time, ‘March forward, thou King of Straw! Show thyself to the Council with the insignia of the regal honor; we have rendered unto thee.’ A large body of councillors, with Caiaphas at their head, were still in the room, and they looked with both delight and approbation at the shameful scene which was enacted, beholding with pleasure the most sacred ceremonies turned into derision. The pitiless guards covered him with mud and spittle, and with mock gravity exclaimed, ‘Receive the prophetic unction—the regal unction.’ Then they impiously parodied the baptismal ceremonies, and the pious act of Magdalen in emptying the vase of perfume on his head. ‘How canst thou presume,’ they exclaimed, ‘to appear before the Council in such a condition? Thou dost purify others, and thou art not pure thyself; but we will soon purify thee.’ They fetched a basin of dirty water, which they poured over his face and shoulders, whilst they bent their knees before him, and exclaimed, ‘Behold thy precious unction, behold the spikenard worth three hundred pence; thou hast been baptized in the pool of Bethsaida.’”

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This description of the shameful and relentless physical abuse that Christ suffered before the Sanhedrin is vividly portrayed in *the Passion*, but is absent in the Gospels. Nowhere do the Gospels speak of the crowd pulling Christ's hair and beard, wounding Him with sharp pointed sticks, piercing Him with needles, dragging Him around with a chain hanging around His neck, bruising and tearing His knees with a studded chain with sharp points, and pouring dirty water over His head to mock His regal unction. The exaggeration of Christ's physical abuse before the Sanhedrin serves to support the Catholic view of redemption through the excessive suffering of Jesus, but it obscures the real meaning of Christ's sacrifice for our salvation as presented in the Gospels.

In the Gospels, after His examination before the chief priests, Jesus is bound and taken to Pilate (Mark 15:1; John 18:28). But Gibson follows *The Dolorous Passion* which describes Jesus being shackled and imprisoned in a subterranean prison: "The Jews, having quite exhausted their barbarity, shut Jesus up in a little vaulted prison, the remains of which subsist to this day. . . . The enemies of our Lord did not allow him a moment's respite, even in this dreary prison, but tied him to a pillar which stood in the centre, and would not allow him to lean upon it, although he was so exhausted from ill treatment, the weight of his chains, and his numerous falls, that he could scarcely support himself on his swollen and torn feet. Never for a moment did they cease insulting him; and when the first set were tired out, others replaced them."

At this point *The Passion* portrays Mary kneeling on the flagstones and pressing her ear to the ground to listen to the groaning of her Son. Again, the source of this touching scene is not the Gospels, but probably this account in *The Dolorous Passion*: "Mary was with Jesus in spirit, and Jesus was with her; but this loving Mother wished to hear with her own ears the voice of her Divine Son. She listened and heard not only his moans, but also the abusive language of those around him."<sup>52</sup>

### **The Scourging of Jesus before Pilate**

The contrast between Gibson's movie and the Gospels is most evident in the account of the scourging of Jesus in Pilate's judgment hall. In the Gospels the account of the scourging is brief and sober. They merely state: "... having scourged Jesus, he [Pilate] delivered him to be crucified" (Mark 15:15). "Then Pilate took Jesus and scourged him" (John 19:1).

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The Gospels spend more time describing the mocking with the crown of thorns before the high priest (Mark 15:17-20) than they do the scourging! Yet in *The Passion* the scourging seems to go on forever, lasting ten minutes. It is the most brutal and graphic portrayal of violence in the movie that has been widely criticized. The details of how the scourging was carried out are taken not from the Gospels, but from *The Dolorous Passion*.

The whole of chapter 22 of *The Dolorous Passion* is devoted to the scourging of Jesus. The chapter describes in minute details the four scourgings of Jesus carried out on an alternating basis by six Roman soldiers, who escalated the torture with their arsenal of instruments. Since the scourging of Jesus is the centerpiece of Gibson's movie, we quote a few paragraphs which Gibson portrays with unsurpassed Oscar-winning brutality.

“Pilate was determined to adhere to his resolution of not condemning our Lord to death, and ordered him to be scourged according to the manner of the Romans. The guards were therefore ordered to conduct him through the midst of the furious multitude to the forum, which they did with the utmost brutality, at the same time loading him with abuse, and striking him with their staffs. The pillar where criminals were scourged stood to the north of Pilate's palace, near the guard-house, and the executioners soon arrived, carrying whips, rods, and ropes, which they tossed down at its base. They were six in number, dark, swarthy men, somewhat shorter than Jesus; their chests were covered with a piece of leather, or with some dirty stuff; their loins were girded, and their hairy, sinewy arms bare. . . .

“These cruel men had many times scourged poor criminals to death at this pillar. They resembled wild beasts or demons, and appeared to be half drunk. They struck our Lord with their fists, and dragged him by the cords with which he was pinioned, although he followed them without offering the least resistance, and, finally, they barbarously knocked him down against the pillar. . . .

“Jesus trembled and shuddered as he stood before the pillar, and took off his garments as quickly as he could, but his hands were bloody and swollen. The only return he made when his brutal executioners struck and abused him was to pray for them in the most touching manner: he turned his face once towards his Mother, who was standing overcome with grief; this look quite unnerved her: she fainted, and would have fallen, had not the holy women who were there supported her. . . .



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“The Holy of holies [was] violently stretched, without a particle of clothing, on a pillar used for the punishment of the greatest criminals; and then did two furious ruffians who were thirsting for his blood begin in the most barbarous manner to scourge his sacred body from head to foot. The whips or scourges which they first made use of appeared to me to be made of a species of flexible white wood, but perhaps they were composed of the sinews of the ox, or of strips of leather. . . .

“Our loving Lord, the Son of God, true God and true Man, writhed as a worm under the blows of these barbarians; his mild but deep groans might be heard from afar; they resounded through the air, forming a kind of touching accompaniment to the hissing of the instruments of torture. These groans resembled rather a touching cry of prayer and supplication, than moans of anguish. . . .

“Several of the servants of the High Priests went up to the brutal executioners and gave them money; as also a large jug filled with a strong bright red liquid, which quite inebriated them, and increased their cruelty tenfold towards their innocent Victim. The two ruffians continued to strike our Lord with unremitting violence for a quarter of an hour, and were then succeeded by two others. His body was entirely covered with black, blue, and red marks; the blood was trickling down on the ground, and yet the furious cries which issued from among the assembled Jews showed that their cruelty was far from being satiated. . . .

“Then two fresh executioners commenced scourging Jesus with the greatest possible fury; they made use of a different kind of rod, a species of thorny stick, covered with knots and splinters. The blows from these sticks tore his flesh to pieces; his blood spouted out so as to stain their arms, and he groaned, prayed, and shuddered.

“[Then] two fresh executioners took the places of the last mentioned, who were beginning to flag; their scourges were composed of small chains, or straps covered with iron hooks, which penetrated to the bone, and tore off large pieces of flesh at every blow. What word, alas! could describe this terrible—this heart-rending scene!

“The cruelty of these barbarians was nevertheless not yet satiated; they untied Jesus, and again fastened him up with his back turned towards the pillar. As he was totally unable to support himself in an upright position, they passed cords round his waist, under his arms, and above his

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knees, and having bound his hands tightly into the rings which were placed at the upper part of the pillar, they recommenced scourging him with even greater fury than before; and one among them struck him constantly on the face with a new rod. The body of our Lord was perfectly torn to shreds, it was but one wound. He looked at his torturers with his eyes filled with blood, as if entreating mercy; but their brutality appeared to increase, and his moans each moment became more feeble.”

### **The Gospels Focus on Christ’s Sacrificial Death**

The preceding lengthy quotes from *The Dolorous Passion* offer a most bloody and gory description of Christ’s scourging, which Gibson portrays masterfully. However, the Gospels offer no details about Christ’s scourging, because they are not obsessed with capturing every holy drop of Christ’s blood and every sacred goblet of His flesh flayed during the flogging. Their account is brief, consisting of only one sentence: “Then Pilate took Jesus and scourged him” (John 19:1).

The inflicting of physical suffering on Christ is the central action of Gibson’s movie, but is secondary in the Gospels. The Gospels teach salvation through Christ’s sacrificial death, not through the intensity of His suffering. We noted in Chapter two that the notion of salvation through suffering is a fundamental Catholic belief that originated in the early part of the second millennium. It is noteworthy that the word “Passion” (*pathein*) is never used in the Gospels with reference to Christ’s sufferings, because the focus is on His sacrificial death for our salvation, not on the intensity of His sufferings to satisfy the demands of a punitive God.

In *The Passion*, the beating, whipping, and ripping of Christ’s flesh is relentless until He is skinned alive and taken apart. When the viewer thinks that the flaying of Jesus’ flesh can get no crueller, it does. In those endless moments when the soldiers escalate their torture with new instruments, Gibson proves his Oscar-winning abilities in portraying violence. The violence of *Braveheart* becomes *Bloodheart* in *The Passion*. Gibson seems determined to show only one color from the full Christian spectrum: blood red.

### **Why Does Gibson Focus on the Brutal Torture of Jesus?**

Why is Gibson dishing out to Christ the kind of punishment that would kill any SUPER MAN three times over? The answer is found in the Catholic understanding of redemption through suffering promoted by *The*

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*Dolorous Passion.* The book assumes that to satisfy the demands of a punitive God for humanity's sins, Christ had to suffer in His body and mind the equivalent of the punishment for all the sins of humankind.

Gibson's unrelenting and brutal vision of *The Passion* reminds us of the great revivalist Jonathan Edwards who during the first great awakening tried to trigger mass conversion by preaching hellfire. His favorite sermon was titled "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." In *The Passion*, Gibson attempts to convert millions to his Catholic understanding of redemption by portraying "God in the Hands of Angry Sinners." Behind both visions stands a bloodthirsty Father, more eager to damn and punish than to save. Such visions may convert some people through fear, but may also cause many to hate God for His sadistic and angry character.

Dr. Charles Krauthammer, a *Washington Post* columnist, finds "Gibson's personal interpretation [of the scourging of Jesus] spectacularly vicious. Three of the Gospels have but a one-line reference to Jesus's scourging. The fourth has no reference at all. In Gibson's movie this becomes ten minutes of the most unremitting sadism in the history of film. Why ten? Why not five? Why not two? Why not zero, as in Luke? Gibson chose 10."

A reason for Gibson's choice of ten minutes of brutal flagellation is to be found in the Catholic punitive view of God reflected in *The Dolorous Passion*. According to this view, God demands full satisfaction for all the sins of humankind through the brutal and inhuman torture of His Son. We noted in Chapter two that such a punitive view of God is foreign to Scripture. In the Bible, the Cross was not a legal transaction in which a meek Christ suffers the harsh punishment imposed by a punitive Father for the sins of humanity. Instead, the Cross reveals how the righteous and loving Father was willing through His Son to become flesh and suffer the punishment of our sins in order to redeem us without compromising His own character.

### **The Procession to Calvary**

Victims to be crucified were required to carry the crossbar, not the entire cross with pole and crossbar. Most likely Jesus carried only the horizontal beam, not the entire Cross, as portrayed in *the Passion*. The load would have been too heavy for a man who had been scourged according to the Roman custom. Matthew, Mark, and Luke do not mention Jesus carrying the Cross. They simply say that Jesus was "led away to be

crucified” (Matt 27:31; Mark 15:21; Luke 23:27). Instead they refer to Simon of Cyrene being required to carry the Cross “behind him,” according to Luke (Luke 23:26; Matt 27:31-32; Mark 15:20-21). John 19:17 describes Jesus as carrying His own Cross, without any mention of Simon of Cyrene.

Gibson follows the text of *The Dolorous Passion* in placing the entire Cross on Jesus’ shoulder: “The archers led Jesus into the middle of the court, the slaves threw down the cross at his feet, and the two arms were forthwith tied on to the centre piece. Jesus knelt down by its side, encircled it with his sacred arms, and kissed it three times, addressing, at the same time, a most touching prayer of thanksgiving to his Heavenly Father for that work of redemption which he had begun. . . . The archers soon made him rise, and then kneel down again, and almost without any assistance, place the heavy cross on his right shoulder, supporting its great weight with his right hand.”

In *The Passion* Gibson has Simon of Cyrene and Jesus carrying the cross together. This scene openly contradicts the Gospels’ account: “And as they led him away, they seized one Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and laid on him the cross, to carry it behind Jesus” (Luke 23:26; cf. Mark 15:21; Matt 27:32).

In the Gospels it is clear that Simon carries the Cross for Jesus by himself while following the totally exhausted Jesus. One wonders, Why does Gibson misrepresent the Gospel story by having both Jesus and Simon carry the Cross together? Most likely it is to promote more effectively the Catholic devotion to the Passion of Christ. Had Christ been relieved altogether from carrying the Cross, then His sufferings would have been reduced, and consequently He would have failed to satisfy the demands of divine justice for the sins of humankind.

In *The Passion* Jesus falls seven times during the procession along the traditional 14 Stations of the Cross. Again this information is derived not from the Gospels but from *The Dolorous Passion*, which describes in great detail the seven falls of Jesus in chapters 31 to 36. The story of the seven falls of Jesus is based on medieval legends that have become part of Catholic religious tradition.

Another unbiblical scene described in *The Dolorous Passion* and portrayed in the movie is Mary accompanying Jesus along the *Via Dolorosa* using side streets. In *The Passion*, when the Roman soldiers

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inquire of her identity, they are told, “She is the mother of the Galilean. Do not impede her.” During this journey, Christ stops and falls seven times because He has no strength left to go on. At those points, Mary is always near Christ and acts as His comforter and coach. Through their eye contact, Mary infuses mystical power on her Son. At one point she reassures her Son, saying: “I am here.”

In *The Dolorous Passion* we read that when Jesus fell the second time, “Mary was perfectly agonized at this sight; she forgot all else; she saw neither soldiers nor executioners; she saw nothing but her dearly-loved Son; and, springing from the doorway into the midst of the group who were insulting and abusing him, she threw herself on her knees by his side and embraced him. The only words I heard were, ‘Beloved Son!’ and ‘Mother!’”

### The Story of Veronica

*The Dolorous Passion* incorporates also the medieval legend of Seraphia, who became known as Veronica, because the *vera icon*, that is, the true image of Christ, was imprinted on her veil. According to the medieval story *Vindicta Salvatoris* (Vengeance of the Savior), Veronica had earlier been healed by Jesus. On the *Via Dolorosa* she was able to get through the crowd and wipe the bloody face of Jesus with her long veil, thus imprinting His face permanently on her veil. Gibson does a masterful job portraying the legend of Veronica, which is not in the Gospels.

Note the similarities between the movie and *The Dolorous Passion*: “Seraphia [the original name of Veronica] had prepared some excellent aromatic wine, which she piously intended to present to our Lord to refresh him on his dolorous way to Calvary. She had been standing in the street for some time, and at last went back into the house to wait. She was, when I first saw her, enveloped in a long veil, and holding a little girl of nine years of age whom she had adopted. . . . Those who were marching at the head of the procession tried to push her back; but she made her way through the mob, the soldiers, and the archers, reached Jesus, fell on her knees before him, and presented the veil, saying at the same time, ‘Permit me to wipe the face of my Lord.’ Jesus took the veil in his left hand, wiped his bleeding face, and returned it with thanks. Seraphia kissed it, and put it under her cloak. The girl then timidly offered the wine, but the brutal soldiers would not allow Jesus to drink it.”

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Emmerich continues: “No sooner did she reach her room than she placed the woolen veil on a table, and fell almost senseless on her knees. A friend who entered the room a short time after . . . and saw, to his astonishment, the bloody countenance of our Lord imprinted upon the veil, a perfect likeness, although heartrending and painful to look upon. He roused Seraphia, and pointed to the veil. She again knelt down before it, and exclaimed through her tears, ‘Now I shall indeed leave all with a happy heart, for my Lord has given me a remembrance of himself.’”

This popular legend has a great emotional appeal for devout Catholics, but it has no biblical basis whatsoever. It is a purely Catholic legend designed to promote the veneration of relics and icons. Again, Gibson chose to embellish Christ’s Passion by using a popular Catholic legend foreign to the Gospels.

### **The Crucifixion Scene**

The crucifixion scene in *The Passion* stands in stark contrast with the Gospels, because it graphically portrays many brutal details not found in the Bible. The Gospels simply state: “. . . they crucified him” (Mark 15:24; Matt 27:35; Luke 23:33; John 19:18). No details are given on how Christ’s crucifixion was carried out. It is evident that the crucifixion was a most cruel and brutal means of execution, usually reserved for murderous slaves, bandits, and insurrectionists. But the Gospels offer us no details of Christ’s crucifixion. The reason will be discussed shortly.

By contrast, *The Dolorous Passion* devotes seven chapters (38 to 45) to a detailed description of each phase of the crucifixion. For the sake of brevity, we cite only one example, namely, how the soldiers nailed the hands of Jesus to the Cross. This example will suffice to show how closely Gibson follows Emmerich’s account.

“Then seizing his right arm they dragged it to the hole prepared for the nail, and having tied it tightly down with a cord, one of them knelt upon his sacred chest, a second held his hand flat, and a third taking a long thick nail, pressed it on the open palm of that adorable hand, which had ever been open to bestow blessings and favors on the ungrateful Jews, and with a great iron hammer drove it through the flesh, and far into the wood of the cross. Our Lord uttered one deep but suppressed groan, and his blood gushed forth and sprinkled the arms of the archers. . . . The nails were very large, the heads about the size of a crown piece, and the thickness that of

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a man's thumb, while the points came through at the back of the cross. . . . When the executioners had nailed the right hand of our Lord, they perceived that his left hand did not reach the hole they had bored to receive the nail, therefore they tied ropes to his left arm, and having steadied their feet against the cross, pulled the left hand violently until it reached the place prepared for it."

Gibson goes even beyond Emmerich's brutal description of the long nails that went through Jesus' hands to the back of the Cross by portraying the soldiers swinging up the Cross and then slamming its weight down over the body of Jesus pinioned underneath. Professor John Crossman offers a vivid description of this scene from *The Passion*: "After Jesus is nailed to the Cross, it is swung up toward us on a beam-bottom and beam-left ends and then flipped over so that its weight slams down on the top of Jesus' pinioned body. He thuds to the ground, dust rises as his face hits the earth, and the camera moves in for a close-up. The heavy cross is now upside-down on the top of Jesus and we see the sharp nails protruding from the back of the crossbar, as in Emmerich's book. But in Gibson's film the soldiers then hammer the nail-points at the right angles until they are flat to the wood, the reverberations going through it to the hands and arms of Jesus."<sup>60</sup> Crushing Christ's body by slamming it under the weight of a heavy falling Cross should have been sufficient to kill Christ on the spot. But for Gibson, Christ is a SUPER MAN who can survive the most brutal punishment in order to satisfy the exacting demands of a punitive God.

### Is Gibson Faithful to Scripture?

The foregoing examination of selected scenes from the mocking, scourging, and crucifixion of Jesus is by no means exhaustive. But the conclusion from the above examples is quite clear: Gibson's portrayal of the Passion of Christ is largely based not on the Gospels, but on Emmerich's mystical visions recorded in *The Dolorous Passion*.

There is no problem with Gibson choosing extra-biblical sources as well as using his own creative imagination for his movie. After all, a film is meant to be a creative artistic expression, not a documentary. The problem is with Gibson's *claim* regarding the faithfulness of his movie to the Gospels and history—a claim that is widely accepted as true, even by respected church leaders. When asked: "How do you find the balance between staying true to the Scripture and your creative interpretation?" Gibson replied, as noted earlier: "Wow, the Scripture are the Scripture—I mean they're unchangeable, although many people try to change them.

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And I think that my first duty is to be as faithful as possible in telling the story so that it doesn't contradict Scriptures."

Gibson's claim to be "as faithful as possible" to Scripture is openly contradicted by his extensive use of *The Dolorous Passion*—a book based on mystical visions and Catholic legends which are foreign to the Bible. We have found that Anne Emmerich alters substantially the Passion story of the Gospels in order to be faithful to traditional Catholic beliefs and legends. To her credit, we noted earlier that she did not regard her visions "as being of any historical value."

Unfortunately, many viewers lack the knowledge necessary to evaluate Gibson's claims and therefore take at face value his statements about the movie, especially since respected church leaders fully support them. It is our hope that this study provides the needed information to help the viewing public to distinguish between the *Passion of Christ according to the Gospels* and the *Passion of Christ according to Mel Gibson*.

### **Why the Gospels Do Not Describe the Brutal of Christ's Scourging and Crucifixion?**

The most striking difference between *The Passion* and the Gospels is found in the presentation of Christ's suffering and death. While the Evangelists mention the scourging and the crucifixion with very few words—"Having scourged Jesus, Pilate delivered him to be crucified" (Matthew, Mark, and Luke)—Gibson spends two solid hours portraying with jarring details the relentless torture of Jesus from Gethsemane to Golgotha.

Why did the Evangelists and the Christians of the first millennium not linger over the brutal physical sufferings of Jesus? Were they ashamed of the Cross, an emblem of the shameful execution of criminals? Hardly so. Paul speaks boldly about Cross: "Far be it from me to glory except in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Gal 6:14). Were they squeamish about the bloody details of the scourging and execution of the Savior? Hardly so. Luke, regarded as the most elegant New Testament writer, describes Judas' death in most graphic details: "Falling headlong he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out" (Acts 1:18).

The Evangelists handled the events of the Passion so discreetly not because they viewed them as embarrassing or unimportant. After all, the Gospel story builds toward them. Rather, the reason is to be found in their



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theological understanding of the Cross. Simply stated, for them the Cross meant *sacrificial death*, not *brutal suffering*. They understood that Christ paid the penalty of our sins not through the intensity of His sufferings, but through His perfect sacrificial death. He came *not to suffer* for our salvation, but “to give his life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45; Matt 20:28; emphasis supplied). He “has appeared at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself” (Heb 9:26; emphasis supplied). The suffering which Christ experienced through His life, especially at the Cross, qualified Him to be a perfect sacrifice for our sins (Heb 5:8-9).

The focus on Christ’s sacrificial death, rather than on the intensity of His suffering, is also found in Christian literature and iconography of the first millennium. During this period, the depiction of the scourging and crucifixion shows little blood. Unlike Gibson, painters and writers follow the Gospels in rendering the Passion with restraint. The depictions are not without drama. Mary and John stand at the foot of the Cross reeling in grief, but Jesus does not express His agony. He is serene, almost regal. His body is not brutalized and torn to shreds, because, as already stated, the Cross was seen as the symbol of Christ’s perfect sacrifice for our redemption.

### **From Sacrificial Death to Brutal Sufferings**

A change came about in the eleventh century when a new understanding developed of the meaning of the Cross. It was a change from a *sacrificial death* to a *brutal suffering* view of the Cross. Anselm, the Archbishop of Canterbury (1033-1109), in his epochal book *Cur Deus Homo?*, that is, *Why God Became Man*, explains that to meet the demands of divine justice, Christ had to suffer in His mind and body the exact equivalent of the punishment due for all of humankind’s sins.

The mystics embraced and expanded this satisfaction view of the atonement by emphasizing the exceeding sufferings Christ had to bear in order to meet the demands of a punitive God for humankind’s sins. This view has served as the wellspring of Christian art and devotion for centuries. It gave rise to that strand of devotion that emphasizes imitation of Christ’s suffering as a way of salvation. It has inspired the late Renaissance painting of the Crucifixion with the contorted bleeding body of Christ, the meditations of mystics, and Bach’s glorious setting of “O Sacred Head, Sore Wounded.” Gibson’s movie follows this old Catholic tradition that focuses on Christ’s brutal suffering to satisfy the demands of

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a punitive God for humankind's sins.

### Scripture Focuses on Christ's Death, not Suffering

The writers of the Gospels chose to describe Jesus' Passion differently from Gibson. They describe Jesus' sufferings in the briefest terms, as if drawing about it a veil of modesty. What is important for them is *not that Jesus suffered intensively for our sins*, but that *He died vicariously for our sins*. According to the Gospels, Christ came, not to save us through the intensity of His sufferings, but "to give his life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45; Matt 20:28).

Paul summarizes the Good News he had preached to the Corinthians in this way: "For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that *Christ died for our sins* according to the scriptures" (1 Cor 1:3; emphasis supplied). "He has reconciled us in his body of flesh *by his death*" (Col 1:22). By partaking of the sacred emblems of the bread and wine, believers "proclaim the Lord's *death* until he comes" (1 Cor 11:26). The emphasis of the apostolic proclamation is on *Christ's vicarious death*, because He saved us through His sacrificial, substitutionary death, not through the intensity of His sufferings.

We noted in Chapter one that a shift occurred in the thirteenth century from the proclamation of Christ's death to the imitation of Christ's sufferings. The outcome of this shift was the development of the unbiblical belief characterized by salvation through sufferings. By imitating Christ's sufferings in their own body, people were taught that they could share in Christ's redemptive sufferings.

A good example is Anne Emmerich, who courted suffering to atone for her sins and the sins of others. In the biographical introduction to *The Dolorous Passion*, we are told that "A great portion of her illnesses and sufferings came from taking upon herself the sufferings of others. Sometimes she asked for the illness of a person who did not bear it patiently, and relieved him of the whole or of a part of his sufferings, by taking them upon herself; sometimes, wishing to expiate a sin or put an end to some suffering, she gave herself up into the hands of God, and he, accepting her sacrifice, permitted her thus, in union with the merits of his passion, to expiate the sin by suffering some illness corresponding to it. She had consequently to bear, not only her own maladies, but those also of others—to suffer in expiation of the sins of her brethren, and of the

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faults and negligence of certain portions of the Christian community—and, finally, to endure many and various sufferings in satisfaction for the souls of purgatory. . . . For sufferings to be really meritorious we must patiently and gratefully accept unsuitable remedies and comforts, and all other additional trials.”

The notion of expiating through sufferings one’s own sins as well as the sins of others is a fundamental Catholic belief which is nowhere to be found in Scripture. The new *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains that through suffering the believer experiences “union with the passion of Christ. By the grace of this sacrament [of anointing the sick] the sick person receives the strength and the gift of uniting himself more closely to Christ’s Passion. . . . Suffering, a consequence of original sin, acquires a new meaning; it becomes a participation in the saving work of Jesus.”

This Catholic belief in salvation through sufferings inspired countless devout Christians, like Anne Emmerich, to bear courageously their sickness and even self-inflicted wounds in order to atone for their sins and the sins of others. The lesson of history is clear. By shifting the focus from Christ’s sacrificial death to the intensity of His sufferings, the true meaning of the Cross was obscured, and a human system of salvation through personal sufferings has resulted.

## CONCLUSION

We began this investigation of Gibson’s portrayal of *The Passion of the Christ* by noting his *claims* concerning the “accuracy” of the movie, namely, that it faithfully depicts the four Gospel accounts of Jesus’ final hours. Being a movie—an expression of artistic creation—Gibson was not obliged to be faithful to the Gospels. He was free to use extra-biblical sources to portray Christ’s Passion according to his own Catholic traditions.

However, if viewers are led to believe, on the basis of Gibson’s claims and with the endorsement of popular preachers, that *The Passion* is faithful to Scripture and history—a claim that we have found to be untrue—then it is imperative to help people understand what is biblical and what is unbiblical in the movie. This is the overall purpose of this chapter and of this book. We wish to provide the tools to help viewers understand the difference between the *Passion according to Mel Gibson* and the *Passion according to the Gospels*.

The basic outline of *The Passion* is true to the Gospels: the arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane, the examination by the High Priest, the trial before Pilate, the scourging, and the crucifixion. These aspects of the film are true to the Gospels and history.

But, much of the film does not represent accurately either the Gospels or history. In crucial areas of the story, *The Passion* departs from the Gospels' narratives. Moreover, several Catholic beliefs embedded in *The Passion*: the brutal sufferings of Jesus to satisfy the demands of a punitive God, the Catholic devotion to Christ's physical sufferings, the Catholic view of the Mass as a reenactment of Christ's suffering and death, the prominent role of Mary as a partner in Christ's redemption, and the collective guilt of the Jews for Christ's death. The last belief was repudiated by the Catholic Church at Vatican II, but is evident throughout the movie.

Summing up, Gibson is a traditionalist Catholic who has produced a Catholic film with a Catholic message. The movie is offering an unprecedented evangelistic opportunity to the Catholic Church. *The Catholic Passion Outreach* rightly affirms: "*The Passion of The Christ* offers an unprecedented cultural opportunity for you to spread, strengthen, and share the Catholic faith with your family and friends. Unlike any other, this movie will inspire hearts and change minds."

The viewing public must be made aware that *The Passion of the Christ* tells the story of Jesus' sufferings and death according to Catholic traditional beliefs. Numerous scenes, like the story of Veronica and the seven falls of Jesus on the way to Golgotha, derive from Catholic legends and superstitions. Most moviegoers do not generally make distinctions between biblical truths and unbiblical legends when viewing a film like *The Passion*, because they respond to the movie emotionally rather than rationally.

It is my hope that this study may help truth-seekers to recognize and appreciate the distinction between *The Passion of Christ according to Mel Gibson* and *The Passion of Christ according to the Gospels*.