

The Passion of the Christ
Based on Scripture & Mel Gibson's Movie
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I want to begin tonight with the same Scripture that the movie opens with. People are asking, "Who killed Jesus?" The answer is found in Isa. 53:5, "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed." Mel Gibson stated he did not appear in his own movie, by his choice, with one exception: It is Gibson's hands seen nailing Jesus to the cross. Gibson said he wanted to do that because it was indeed his own hands that nailed Jesus to the cross (along with all of ours.) Jesus suffered, bled, and died for our sin.

Then the next verse in Isaiah says, "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." Then v.10 says, "Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin..." In a real sense God the Father delivered his own son to death. So even though the Jewish leadership, the Romans, and all humanity have responsibility for the death of Christ, God Himself had a part. In Acts 2:23 Peter said, "Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death." Why would God the Father do this? Why would Jesus be willing to suffer & die? The answer is God's love. God is holy, and must punish sin, but He is loving, and Christ was willing to die in your place. What love!

The willingness of Jesus to suffer for us is highlighted in the opening scene of the movie. Jesus is in Gethsemane. It is the eve of His suffering. He knows what is coming. Even 6 months prior to this, listen to what Jesus said in Mark 10: 33-34, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death and deliver Him to the Gentiles; and they will mock Him, and scourge Him, and spit on Him, and kill Him..." On that very night he took bread and wine saying that his body would be broken, and his blood shed. Yet his humanity shrank from the upcoming suffering. His deity repelled at the thought of bearing sin. He said in Mark 14:34, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death." So he prayed. Was there another way? Hebrews 5:7 says, "...He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death..." Likewise, Luke 22:44 says, "And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground." Whether Satan tempted him regarding the decision, as in the movie, we do not know. But Jesus won the victory. Luke 22:43 says, "Then an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him." Each time he affirmed, "...nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done. He arose from prayer, ready to face the betrayal, and all that was to follow. Some ask, "What was the meaning when Christ stomped the head of the snake in the garden?" The Gethsemane episode portrays Jesus as the fulfillment of Genesis 3:15. Jesus is the promised seed of the woman who will crush the head of the Serpent, Satan.

Then Judas led the temple police & others to Jesus. When Peter saw Jesus being arrested, he drew his sword, and attempted to fight back, cutting off the ear of Malchus, the servant of the high priest (John 18:10). Notice that Jesus said in Matthew 26:52, "Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword." Oh, how our violent world needs to hear these words of Jesus!

About the time, Mary, the mother of Jesus woke up, with fear in her face. She asked, "Why is this night different from all other nights?" Remember, it was Passover. She asked the question that Jews ask each year during their traditional observance of Passover. Mary Magdalene replies that the night commemorates the liberation of God's people from their bondage in Egypt. At that very moment, a messenger burst through the door with news of Jesus' arrest. The scene is intended to highlight the theological connection between the Passover and the death of Christ. It presents the passion of Jesus as a New Exodus, an act that accomplishes the liberation of God's people from slavery to sin.

After Jesus was arrested, he was at some point abused by the Jewish temple police. Luke 22:63-65 says, "Now the men who held Jesus mocked Him and beat Him. And having blindfolded Him, they struck Him on the face and asked Him, saying, "Prophecy! Who is the one who struck You?" And many other things they blasphemously spoke against Him."

Also in the film, around the time of the arrest, Mary said, "It has begun. So be it." Throughout the film we see Mary suffering with her son, Jesus. Indeed, shortly after the birth of Jesus, Simeon warned Mary in Luke 2:35, "yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also."

I like the fact that the film includes the fact that during the so-called trial, Jesus affirmed that He is indeed the Son of God. The high priest asked Him, "Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" Jesus said, "I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven" (Mark 14:62-63). His deity was mostly veiled in his life, suffering, and death, but the day is coming when His deity will be fully manifested to all the world! Even so, come Lord Jesus!

Jesus was brought before Pilate, the governor. Under Roman law, the Jews did not have the right to put anyone to death. Only the Romans could order execution. Pilate did everything he could to avoid making a decision about Jesus. He sent Him to Herod, and that didn't work. He had him scourged, hoping that would satisfy the crown. He said, "Behold the Man." See Him, bloody, beaten, bruised. Isn't that enough punishment? That did work. He offered a choice between releasing a foul murderer, or Jesus. They chose Barabbas. So that did work either. In the end he had to make a choice, and he made the wrong choice. Even so, you can't avoid making a decision about Jesus. He stands at the crossroad of every life. Have you chosen Jesus as your Savior? Don't reject Him.

One of the most intense scenes in the movie is the scourging of Jesus. Jesus predicted 6 months before that He would be scourged (Mark 10:34). The Gospel accounts give no details whatsoever. They just say that Jesus was scourged. None of the original gospel readers needed any details. They were very familiar with the practice. I like the way Jesus, knowing what is about to happen to Him, says, "My heart is ready." In the movie they beat him with rods about 39 times, to the point that he could no longer stand up. Normally, that would be the extent of scourging. After it was over, in the movie Jesus stood up. It was as if the Romans said, "Well, tough guy, we'll give you more." This time, they took the infamous cat of 9 tails. The end of each leather thong had bone, glass, or even metal. With each lash it would rip the person, and cause great pain. In the movie they must have lashed in 39 more times, over all parts of His body. At one point Mary says, "My son, when will you choose to be delivered from this?" Oh, He could have. He had said at the time of His arrest in Matthew 26:53, "Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels?" Instead, He chose to endure untold torture for at least 2 reasons: First, that was the only way we could be saved. Isaiah 53:5 says, "...by His stripes we are healed." Secondly, this pictures how horrible sin is. Every lash is an expression of God's holy wrath against sin. Christ's

death holds a mirror up confronting us with the brutal reality of how bad our sin really is. We don't know if it was exactly like the movie, but we do know from the prophet Isaiah, chapter 52, v. 14, he says, "Just as many were astonished at you, So His visage was marred more than any man...."

One of the strangest scenes in the movie is that of Satan watching the scourging. A little later, he is holding and caressing what looks like a baby, yet the baby is old. A seminary professor said this was Satan saying to his demon son, "I would never abandon my son to such suffering."

I was touched by the flashback to the teaching of Jesus in John 15:18, "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you." Why is this movie controversial? It is because the world hates the real Jesus. And if Jesus was willing to bear the hatred of the world for us, we also should be willing to bear that hatred. Yet, a little later in the movie, there is a flashback to another teaching of Jesus in Matthew 5:44, "But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you." That is what we are called to do. That is what this world needs!

We have already discussed that after the scourging, Jesus was brought back to Pilate. In the end, Pilate decided to please the crowd rather than do the right thing. He ordered that He be put to death by crucifixion, a horrible means of execution.

On the way to the cross, we see one of the most touching scenes in the movie. Mary, Mary Magdalene, & John follow Jesus. At one point Jesus falls under the weight of the cross. Mary has a flashback to a time when her son fell. He cried out to her, and as any mother would, she ran to him, picked him up in her arms, and comforted him. With that flashback, she ran to her son, who had fallen under the cross to comfort him once again. But this time, Jesus comforts her. He says what is found in Revelation 21:5, "Behold, I make all things new." With determination, Jesus goes to the place of crucifixion, knowing that by His death, all things will be made new. He will bring to pass Rev. 21:4, "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." This also points to 2 Corinthians 5:17.

There are other flashbacks. He thinks of John 10:11, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep." He thinks of John 15:13, "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends." And in a world that says there are many ways to God, this movie quotes Jesus in John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."

More than once as Jesus is suffering on the cross, the movie portrays Him praying, "Father forgive them." I like the part when the thief says to the High Priest, "Listen, he prays for you."

At the end Jesus dies. Satan yells. Was it a scream of defeat or victory? I felt that Satan did not realize he was defeated until the resurrection. However, on further reflection, that may not have been the case. The darkness, earthquake, and the rent veil all could have made him realize that his plot to kill Jesus had failed. Col. 2:14-15 says, "having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He [Jesus] has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it." The torn veil in the temple shows that now all men have access to God through His Son Jesus. One of the last scenes pictures a close-up of the crown of thorns & the nails.

Then, the final scene: Jesus rises from the dead! After seeing this movie, there is no one

you could believe that Jesus was not truly dead. His resurrection was not just a case of a near dead man reviving. Furthermore, the disciples were in no mood or position to fabricate a resurrection story. He is alive. Hallelujah! Have you put your faith in Him as your Savior?

Other points: Several of the scenes, particularly the portrayals of demonic activity, have no parallels in the New Testament and are a product of artistic license. Likewise the flashbacks to Jesus' childhood and young adulthood were expressions of creative freedom by the filmmaker.