The Purpose for the Passion of the Christ

Matthew 27:27-44 and selected Scriptures

(4/9/04)

The Hollywood actor Mel Gibson has directed his first film. Gibson's motion picture "the Passion of the Christ" is one of the most highly anticipated and controversial films of our time. Some evangelical Christians call it "the greatest evangelistic tool of our time"

This two hour film which cost 25 million dollars to produce premiered and paid for itself on Ash Wednesday, February 25th 2004. It quickly became the highest grossing five day opening ever with $125.2 million in sales (beating the recently released "The Return of the King").

The Purpose of the film is to reenact the last twelve hours of Jesus' earthly life. Therefore, it begins in the Garden of Gethsemane and ends with Jesus' burial (with about 15 seconds of His resurrection).

The dialogue consists of two dead languages: Latin (Romans) and Aramaic (Jews). Gibson's desire is that through subtitles, Christ's Passion would transcend language barriers. Thus, the film can easily be translated into hundreds of languages.

Although Gibson drew much of his inspiration from the four Gospels, he was also affected by an 18th century German Catholic mystic and Nun, sister Anne Catherine Emmerich, whose visions of the Passion are recorded in her diary and were later compiled into a book: "The Dolorous Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ". While no one can deny that Gibson afforded himself cinematic-license, due in part to his extra-Biblical influence, for the most part, the movie remains biblically accurate. (Michael Makidon, "Does Mel Gibson's Passion Fall Short?" Grace in Focus, Mar/Apr. 2004).

Passion – From Pathos – Describing the Suffering of the Christ.

Accurate Details in the Passion (See Article by James R. Wicker)

Certainly, to depict the last 12 hours of Christ's physical suffering and death in a 2 hour movie requires Mel Gibson to have some leeway for "Artistic License" but Mr. Gibson went a bit beyond artistic license at many points throughout the film.

Additional Scenes added to the Biblical Account:

- As Jesus is being escorted after his arrest, the soldiers throw Jesus off of a bridge by massive chains; he falls onto the rocky ground below and is then brutally yanked up again and again (Gibson got this from the visions of Catholic mystic, Anne-Catherine Emmerich; cited by Tim Challies, www.wayoflife.org)

- Pontius Pilate's wife gives some cloths to Mary who along with Mary Magdalene use them to wipe up Jesus' blood after He is whipped (From Anne-Catherine Emmerich's visions)

- A young woman tries to give Jesus a drink of water or wine on the way to the cross, but a Roman soldier stops her. Before she tries to give him a drink, she wipes his face with her cloth and the image of his bloody face is imprinted on the cloth. (Based on a Catholic legend about Veronica)

- **Throughout the film, (while she is not explicitly venerated) Mary is overly emphasized and in many ways implicitly venerated to an Unbiblical extreme:**

  Clairvoyance & Supernatural Omniscience of Mary:
  Gibson conveys Mary as having special divine powers and knowledge.
  Mary wakes up and senses Jesus' agony
  Mary is the only person other than Jesus who can see Satan (with supernatural ability)
  Mary goes to a specific place in the temple and lays down on the floor with her head on the stones because she sensed the presence of Jesus chained underneath the floor.

  Veneration of Mary as "Mother"
  Peter and John call Mary "Mother" with a capital M in the subtitles.
  After Peter's denial of Christ, he gets on his knees before Mary, calls her "Mother" and confesses his denial to her. She holds out her hand to him (as if she is going to forgive him), and he runs away saying that he isn't worthy.

  Mary gives strength to Jesus:
  Once when Jesus falls down, he is depicted as not having the strength to rise until he looks at Mary and gains strength from her. He is depicted as receiving strength from her at other times as well; He would frequently look into Mary's eyes and then would somehow regain the strength needed to continue on.

  Mary asks to die with Christ:
  As she is looking up at the cross, Mary asks Jesus if she can die with him. She says, "Flesh of my flesh and heart of my heart, let me die with you." By wanting to participate in His death, she hints at a co-redemption. However, such a thought as Mary participating in Christ's vicarious work and suffering is utterly blasphemous.
  Hebrews 1:3 "…he had by himself purged our sins, (and then) sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high"

- The creepy portrayal of Satan was troubling:
  The Satan woman looking at Jesus suffer holding an ugly looking baby was unnecessary. Supposedly a parody of the Madonna & Child (a contrast with Mary and Jesus).

- The Demon Children who attacked Judas was an unnecessary scene. (It was a scene based upon the Visions of the Catholic mystic, Anne-Catherine Emmerich)

  The most serious of all additions it that the movie put words into the mouth of Christ that he never spoke.

  Unsaved men are not afraid to adding to and modifying the Bible. We as believers should never look lightly upon an addition or an omission from the text of Holy Scripture.

Proverbs 30:6 Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar.

Scenes that are Contrary to the Biblical Account:

- Jesus is depicted as a tall, handsome Caucasian man with long hair.
  The Bible Says:
  Isaiah 53:2
  "…he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him."
  Jesus wearing long hair is contrary to His own standards for men in 1 Corinthians 11:14 which states: "Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him?"

- Mary Magdalene is depicted as the woman caught in adultery in John 7:53-8:11. Whereas the Bible only describes her as a woman who was formerly demon possessed.
  Luke 8:2 And certain women, which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary called Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils"

- Jesus and the disciples are seated at the Last Supper instead of reclining (Actually John leaned n Jesus' chest (John 13:23). With regard to the seating arrangement, in the film, Peter is depicted as seated beside Jesus, but actually he had t motion to John to have him ask Jesus a question (see John 13:24-25).

- Jesus prays in the Garden of Gethsemane "I am your servant and the son of your handmaid" (an unscriptural Catholic exaltation of Mary).

- In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus crushes the head of the serpent. However, Jesus destroyed the power of the devil by His death, not in the Garden (Heb.2:14).

- Mary has the blood of Jesus on her mouth. While he is on the cross, Mary comes up and kisses his foot. The blood runs down into her mouth, and she backs away almost licking her kips with blood all over her face (that's taking transubstantiation literally).

Important Omissions from the Film:

- When the soldiers come to arrest Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, when Jesus said "I AM *he*" nobody fell backward to the ground as the Bible says.
  John 18:6
  As soon then as he had said unto them, I am he, they went backward, and fell to the ground.
  (Note: the "I AM" response of Jesus clearly identified Him as the "I AM" of Exodus 3:14. A clear reference to Jesus being Yahweh (Jehovah) God!
  Exodus 3:14 And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.

  What a chance to show the power and deity of Jesus Christ! Mel Gibson missed what would have been one of the most powerful scenes of his movie.

- As Jesus is on the Via Dolorosa (which lasted for much of the movie), Jesus never tells the mourners to stop weeping for Him and weep for themselves and for their children.
  Luke 23:28 But Jesus turning unto them said, Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children.

- With all of the gore, blood and brutality done to Jesus, Mel Gibson missed the fact that Scripture teaches that Christ's beard was also pulled out.
  Isaiah 50:6 - I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting.

- Where were the garments that were bartered for? This was an important fulfillment of prophesy that was omitted
  Matthew 27:35 And they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots.

- The Resurrection of Christ is only given about 15 seconds at the end of the film. An excellent job was done by Gibson to show Christ rise right out of His burial clothes, which is true to the record. However the film ends too abruptly with a bare legged Jesus walking out of the tomb.

An issue that must be addressed.
Is it right to use images in any form to portray God (or Christ)?

Some Evangelical Christians are hailing movies like "the Passion of the Christ" as part of a new and better way of spreading the Gospel. It is indeed true that we live in a highly visual and increasingly anti-literate society that places a premium on sound bites and easily assimilated visual imagery, but it does not mean that we should abandon preaching. (Andrew J. Webb)

While illustrations in various forms & object lessons can be used with Biblical discretion to help the listener understand the message of God's Word, it must be emphasized that God requires faith in Christ which comes from His Word – the Bible as the means to salvation.

Faith does not come by "seeing" but by hearing God's Word.
Romans 10:17
So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.
2 Cor. 5:7
(For we walk by faith, not by sight:)
Romans 8:24
For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?
1 Peter 1:8
Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory:

The Lord God gave believers "a Wordbook, not a picture book "

God said that people would be converted by the foolishness of preaching and not by the foolishness of pictures.
1 Corinthians 1:21 For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.

God admonishes us:

2 Tim. 4:2-4
Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. [3] For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; [4] And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.

Andrew J. Webb writes:
Every visual representation of Jesus is inevitably a lie (it will never totally depict Him in His deity) God went to great lengths not to leave us with any description of the physical appearance of His Son lest we fall into the sin of image making.
All visual representations of Jesus are lies in that they can never hope to represent the glory of Christ in His true nature….Jesus was not merely a man. Jesus was also God, and no artist or filmmaker who has ever lived could hope to create an image that captures the true Glory of Jesus as God.

What any visual image tends to do is limit one's conception of something that is described specifically by words. Visualizations are not only inadequate but they also may deceive and put concepts into people's minds that they will never get rid of.

Note: This is why God is totally against any form of idolatry or even the carving of images.

Exodus 20:4 Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness *of any thing* that *is* in heaven above, or that *is* in the earth beneath, or that *is* in the water under the earth:

Deut. 4:12-16
And the Lord spake unto you out of the midst of the fire: ye heard the voice of the words, but saw no similitude; only ye heard a voice. … Take ye therefore good heed unto yourselves; for ye saw no manner of similitude on the day that the Lord spake unto you in Horeb out of the midst of the fire: Lest ye corrupt yourselves, and make you a graven image, the similitude of any figure, the likeness of male or female"

The use of objects and the veneration of icons of Christ, Mary, Angels, and Saints was adopted by the seventh ecumenical council at Nicaea in 787 AD.

Isaiah 40:18 To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto him?

Jesus Christ of course was God incarnate. He said "he that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9).
He is the "express image of His person" (Heb.1:3)
He is the "image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15)

No film can portray God! And no film can perfectly portray the uniqueness of Jesus incarnation. It can only destroy it.

Was the film anti-Semitic? Not at all. Not any more than it was anti-Roman. It is (in many ways) as it was.

Can this film be used as an evangelistic tool? I would say it is a conversation starter. It goes only so far. Without giving the whole story, most will leave the theaters in deep bewilderment at what the purpose for all this was. What is it all about? What does Christ's death mean? Was it simply an example of suffering? Was it simply an expression of man's depravity? (How evil those people

were who treated an innocent man like that). In keeping with Roman Catholic theology the intense physical suffering of Christ's crucifixion if the focus along with the emphasis on physical sacrifice.

The purpose of this message is to tell the rest of the story. There is a spiritual aspect to the Crucifixion that cannot be missed. To miss it is to miss God's salvation plan.

Who crucified Jesus? Who was responsible for His death?

Was it Judas' Iscariot who betrayed him to Christ's enemies?
Was it the Jewish Religious authorities who (out of envy) handed him over to Pilate?
Was it Pilate, who could have and should have released him?
Was it the Roman authorities who carried out the actual beating and crucifixion?
Was it you and me? Was it our sins that nailed him to the cross?

While there is an element of truth in all of the above accomplishes to Christ's death, the answer may shock you.

Surprisingly, the Bible names God as the one responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus!

Isaiah 53:4-6

Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, ***smitten of God****, and afflicted. [5] But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. [6] All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and* ***the Lord hath laid on him*** *the iniquity of us all.*

Why did Jesus suffer and die? The central issue of Jesus' death is not the cause, but the meaning of His death. What was Christ's purpose? What did His death accomplish?

Jesus came to die to satisfy God's wrath against sin

Jesus came to die to substitute himself for you and me (He took our place)

Jesus came to die to fulfill O.T. prophesies regarding God's required payment for sin

God's purpose for Christ's death is pictured for us in 3 dramatic signs that accompanied His death.

INTRODUCTION: **Matthew 27:27-44**

V. 45-54

These verses are among the most awesome in the Bible.

God is making a powerful statement by three supernatural events that occurred on the day Christ died.

The crucifixion lasted a total of six hours (from 9:00 a.m. [Mk. 15:25} until 3:00 p.m.). Verses 45-54 focus on the last 3 hours.

Whether Wednesday or Friday, this was no normal day in human history.

I. Sign # 1 DARKNESS (v. 45-50)
(The Sin of the World Had Been Paid For)

V. 45

The last 3 hours of Christ's death on Calvary are the most important and significant moments of human history.

During these short 180 minutes (or 10,800 seconds), the most vital work for humanity was accomplished.

After the scorning of the crowd and after the saving of the penitent thief (Lk. 23:43), a mysterious, eerie darkness started to fall upon the earth.

A "shepherd stands staring at the now blackened sky. Only seconds before he had stared at the sun. Now there is no sun. The sky is black. No thunder. No lightening. No clouds. The sheep are restless. The feeling is eerie. What is this hellish darkness? What has happened?" (Max Lucado)

Perhaps a scream is heard in the distance. Many, pointing to the sky, momentarily forget about those on the crosses. Then the crowd begins to break up and hurry toward the gates. The men cease their work, and the women fling their shawls over their heads and run with their children to get shelter from what seems to be a brewing storm.

People in fear say: "What is this? What's going on?"

What is amazing is that noon time is the time that the sun is at its highest point, at its zenith.

The means God used to darkness the earth is uncertain. We know that *"the sun was darkened."* (Lk. 23:45)

A prolonged eclipse is one answer, or a miraculous Heaven-sent darkening of the sun is another.

"Over all the land" - the word *"land"* can also mean "earth" (SEE: quote from Jim Bishop, *"The Day Christ Died"*, p. 327).

This darkness "was as though all of creation was sympathizing with the Creator. There were three days of darkness in Egypt before the Passover (Ex. 10:21-23) and there were three hours of darkness before the Lamb of God died for the sins of the world" (Wiersbe, p. 103).

The darkening of the sun marks the time of God's Judgment. God's Son was judged for our sin! (NOTE: The "Day of the Lord" will be initiated by darkness! - Joel 2:31; Rev. 6:12, 17; cp. Amos 5:20; Zeph. 1;14-15).

God's judgment of those in hell involves darkness (II Pet. 2:4; Jude 6; Mt. 8:12).

"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" - This is a quote from Psalm 22:1; read Ps. 22:1, 7-8, 13-18).

From 12:00 - 3:00, Christ fully drank of that bitter cup He so much dreaded. (SEE: Mt. 26:36-42).

The phrase *"exceedingly sorrowful"* (Mt. 26:38) indicates an unfathomable depth of anguish and sorrow.

What was that *"cup"?* It was the spiritual suffering (the *"travail of his soul"* - Is. 53:11) as He took upon Himself the full brunt of the sin of the world (Is. 53:4-6).

The contents of this cup involved the poisonous, toxic, dark, putrefying, cursed sin of the world that Jesus took upon Himself (II Cor. 5:21).

This horrible cup of agonizing pain and suffering was a cup given by God the Father. Jesus was *"smitten of God, and afflicted"* (Is. 53:4).

"The LORD hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (is. 53:6)

"Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; he hath put him to grief. . . [the Father made] his soul an offering for sin" (Is. 53:10)

The most horrible contents of the cup of which Jesus drank was the momentary yet infinite separation between He and the Father.

As Jesus *"bore our sins in his own body on the tree" (I Pet. 2:24)*, the Father as it were turned His back on His Son and forsook Him. For the first time in eternity, a split, a schism, a separation between the Father and the Son occurred.

At no time in history or eternity past had the Son ever been abandoned. from the Father.

Christ experienced not only a physical death, but during those 3 hours on the cross He "tasted" a spiritual death (which involved the separation of his soul from the Father.

God the Father and the Son had known perfect intimacy in eternity past. Together, the triune Godhead planned creation. *"Let us make man in our image."*

Together, the Father and Soon created the universe - *"by whom also he made the worlds"* (Heb. 1:2; cp. Col. 1:16; Jn. 1:3)

The Father and Son both confused the languages at Babel (Gen. 11:7); the Father and Son both desired that a prophet be sent to preach to Israel - Is. 6:8).

Together the Father and Son had an unfathomable love (Jn. 17:23-24, 26). Since they shared the same nature, they knew each other more fully and completely than any other could (Mt. 11:27). While on earth, Christ desired nothing more than to please the Father (Mt. 3:17; Mt. 17:3; Jn. 8:29).

The Father and Son had a unity that was so personal and intimate (Jn. 17:21, 23) because together they were one in essence and nature (Jn. 10:30).

Yet on the cross an abandonment occurred.

Jesus *"endured the cross despising the same"* (Heb. 12:2)

He was made a *"curse for us"* in order to remove us from *"the curse of the Law."* (Gal. 3:13).

"The Bridge Story"

V. 50

What did Jesus cry out with a loud voice? Two cries -

1)*"It is finished"* (Jn. 19:30)

2)*"Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit"* (Lk. 23:46)

II. Sign # 2 THE TORN VEIL (v. 51a) (A New Covenant Had Been Provided)

As the sun begins to shine again, a man rushes into his house. His wife, huddled with her children and about to blow out the flame in her lamp, hears him breathlessly say: *"The temple curtain. . . torn!"*

V. 51

"Behold" - Look! See! God is grabbing our attention to a significant fact.

Each year on "Yom Kippur" (the Day of Atonement) the High Priest would enter where no one else was allowed. He would go into the Holy of Holies with blood to make atonement for Israel. This was the most somber of all Jewish holy Days. (Lev. 23:26-32). Such mourning and gloom over their sin perfectly corresponds to the dark and somber day Christ died.

The "*veil"* - was the curtain which separated the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place and the rest of the Temple (In the holy of Holies was the Ark of the Covenant and the Mercy Seat).

"Josephus reported that the veil was four inches thick, was renewed every year, and that horses tied to each side could not pull it apart. (cited by Ryrie).

"top to bottom" - this phrase shows that the Old Testament priesthood was completely and totally done away with and that we now have complete and total access into God's presence.

The tearing of the Temple veil symbolized the fact that believers (after Christ's one, final, and complete sacrifice) now have direct access into God's presence through Christ (SEE: Heb. 10:19-22)

III. Sign # 3 EARTHQUAKE (v. 51b-53) (God's Power Over the Grave Had Been Promised)

V. 51

The third climactic sign that occurred was *"The earth shook and the rocks split open."*

One of the most powerful ways for God to make a statement is to send an earthquake.

The timing of this quake has great significance. It occurred at the same moment Christ *"yielded up the ghost."*

So as the draw people's attention to the great significance of Christ's death, God sends an earthquake marking the finality and completion of Christ's work on earth, and marking Christ's grand exit from this world. (EX: the noise and power of the thrust a rocket makes when it launches off of the earth).

The New Covenant had been provided!

Note the parallel: The earthquake at Mount Sinai (when the O.T. Covenant was given - Ex. 19:16ff).

The earthquake at Calvary (when the N.T. Covenant was provided)

V. 52

"The graves were opened" - The earthquake caused the stones to roll away from the burial caves.

NOTE: the connection between this earthquake and the graves opening, and the earthquake and Christ's grave opening (Mt. 28:2).

The last clause of V. 52 must be connected to v. 53. Although the graves were opened at Christ's death, this resurrection of many saints did not occur until after His resurrection. (since Christ is the *"first fruits of them that slept"* - I Cor. 15:20).

CONCLUSION: (v. 54)

All of Christ's life on earth had been building up toward this great climax. This 3 hour period (a "baptism" of death) was the goal and purpose of His entrance into the human race (Lk. 19:10; I Tim. 1:15).

What do you do with that day in history? What does it mean to you?

If God sent darkness and turned his back on his one-of-a-kind Son, if God ripped the Jewish temple veil in two; if God split the earth's rocks open and flung open the graves, then this was the most critical moment in history!

1.Have you accepted the fact that your sins were paid for on Calvary?

2.Have you understood that a new and living way has been provided for you?

3.Have you trusted in the finished work of Jesus Christ and his promise off life after death?