

# The Scarlet Thread

By Paul Lagan



It began with a declaration of war, a war of worlds, a cosmic conflict in which you and I are the prizes, when God Himself declared war on Satan.

God promised that mankind would be the beneficiary of a champion whose appearance is the ultimate drama of all time. The question was, where would this mysterious deliverer come from? The clues kept coming in various forms. The puzzle became clear over the centuries. He would be a descendant of Adam. Thus, Satan's strategy was an attempt to contaminate the human gene

pool with ineligible hybrids. But that plan was washed away and preserved through the judgment of the flood.

Next God revealed that His plan would focus on a descendant of Abraham, which gave Satan 400 years to plan his attack. Then we discovered that the deliverer would be a descendant of David, and a chain of attacks occurred to wipe out his family. Many times there were attempts to eliminate his heirs but there was always an intervention that foiled these sinister plots.

When the commitment was made known that the Promised One was to be of the royal house of David, a blood curse on that line of ascension ensued. However, as we begin to unravel the data hidden behind the virgin birth, we not only find that it affirms the genealogical paradox, but fulfills the pronouncements of Isaiah over seven centuries before, and even parallels the predictions in the early chapters of Genesis. It thus reveals that the entire program was predetermined!

In accordance with His preannounced mandate in Isaiah, Christ ministered for several years only to be betrayed into the hands of His enemies. But even here, the mystery intensifies: Although the plot was to not take this persons life on a holiday, Jesus Himself precipitates the timing by His announcement at, of all places, a Passover supper. After six illegal trials He is sentenced to be crucified!

Death by crucifixion was not new within the Roman Empire. In the year 70 B.C., the Roman orator Cicero initiated a prosecution against Verres, the Roman governor of Sicily, for cruelty and malfeasance in office. Verres had sentenced a Roman citizen named Gavius to prison in the stone quarries of Syracuse. Somehow, Gavius escaped, made his way to the city of Messina, and was boarding a ship to Rome, exclaiming that he was going there to protest about Verres. Verres' agents heard about these protests and arrested Gavius. Just then, Verres himself happened to arrive in Messina. He had Gavius stripped naked, scourged – and crucified!

Cicero describes crucifixion as *“that most cruel and disgusting of penalties,”* and mentions that as Gavius saw the cross being made ready, *“the hapless and broken sufferer . . . had never seen such an accursed thing until then.”* He then adds, *“There is no fitting word that can describe so horrible a deed.”* This is the death that Christ, the Son of God, was to suffer some 100 years later.

As we stare in astonishment at the cross we ask the question, *“What held Jesus to those grim timbers?”* It wasn't the nails! The writer states, *“He was crucified on a cross of wood, yet He made the hill on which it stood.”* The Creator of the Universe could have said at any time, *“Enough is enough.”* When His enemies sought a special guard to watch over the tomb, Pilate cynically yielded, *“Make it as sure as you can.”* I believe that Pilate suspected that even the grave couldn't hold Him!

Through the centuries, various theories have been advanced to explain the resurrection of Jesus Christ. All remain unconvincing. After Jesus was crucified under Roman authority, His body was taken down from the cross to be buried. As was the custom of the day, His body was wrapped in one hundred pounds of preserving burial ointment. He was then placed in the tomb of a Jerusalem Sanhedrin member, Joseph of Arimathea. A Roman guard, consisting of twelve men from the empire's crack legion, was stationed in front of the tomb. The soldiers were under orders that no one was to come near. Should they leave their post for any reason, the punishment was death. The Roman and Jewish leaders secured the burial place by ordering a two-ton stone to be placed in front of the tomb's opening. Finally, the emperor's seal of authority was fixed to the stone covering the tomb. Anyone who broke the seal was punished by death.

Yet, somehow, three days later the tomb was empty. The followers of Jesus claimed He had risen from the dead. Did He? If not, what are the alternatives? Could the Jewish leaders have stolen the body? No, for they had no motive and certainly could not have overpowered the Roman soldiers. Also, they would have produced the body to disprove the resurrection claims of Jesus' followers. Could the disciples have stolen the body? These men, who abandoned Jesus at His arrest and crucifixion, did not possess the military power nor any other means to overthrow twelve of the emperor's top guards, who were within shouting distance of the entire Roman garrison. On the contrary, the disciples were frightened and secretly hid in the city. Could the women have stolen the body? Are we to believe that three women moved a two-ton stone after overpowering twelve Roman soldiers? All these theories are preposterous. The only possible explanation is that Jesus Christ was resurrected from the dead by Divine power.

You may ask, "*Then where does faith come in?*" Christian faith is based on historical reality, not blind subjectivity. There is much evidence supporting the resurrection of Jesus which can be examined and explained by anyone who commits to the study of Scripture from a historical standpoint. This demands that we go beyond our traditional "Bible studies," and get to the depth of our belief. Jesus was a Jew; what did the Jewish people of that day believe and practice? What did the early followers of Christ conclude about Him and how did they evangelize? How and why did much of our Christian theology change through the centuries? Where did the deceptive statement that we are to "Hate the sin but love the sinner," and many others come from? Much of this information can be obtained through the reading of credible books on the subjects – unbiased recorded history, not fables or superstitions! Yet, the level of commitment always goes beyond the knowledge of the facts. We cannot prove the resurrection of Jesus with complete certainty, but there is overwhelming evidence every Christian should be aware of in order to defend their faith.

The total dedication and commitment of the early disciples to the gospel is strong evidence for the truth of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Twelve men from various walks of life left everything to follow Him. They traveled with Jesus for approximately three years, but upon His arrest and crucifixion each one fled and hid in fear. Yet something incredible happened shortly thereafter, for within a few days after His death and burial, the disciples proclaimed the resurrection of Jesus openly and bravely.

The main preaching of the earliest followers of Christ was not "how to get along with their neighbor," or "forgiveness toward Herod and the Roman legions," but the announcement that "*Christ is alive.*" Everything else was secondary. Their commitment to this belief cannot be explained in any psychological terms other than they believed what they claimed – actually happened! Several of the disciples had a strong dislike, and in some cases, hatred for the **G**entile nations. Yet, remarkably, their attitudes changed. They insisted on traveling to obscure places to share God's message to people of all races. They claimed that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was crucified and rose from the dead, and insisted on sharing this news, even to the point of death. According to tradition, eleven of the twelve disciples suffered a martyr's death for what they believed, preached, and taught. Jacobus de Voragine, in his writing Golden Legend: Leguna Aurea, states that the Roman soldier, Longinus,

who pierced the side of Jesus with a spear, soon became a Christian after his experience at the foot of the cross, and later died as a martyr for his faith.

If the disciples know the resurrection of Christ was a hoax, or could be explained in any other way, they would not have been willing to die for their faith. Throughout history, many martyrs have died for something that was true. But few have died for what they believed to be a lie. It is virtually impossible to gather together twelve men or woman and have them propagate a lie, spread it everywhere so that people believe it, and separated from each other by great geographical distances die, for it, knowing it to be a lie. It is a psychological impossibility. The disciples and hundreds of other first-century martyrs knew the resurrection of Jesus Christ was the truth, and they sealed their testimony in their own blood.

The recent deluge of books and movies have made interest and debate as to who Jesus actually was, or if He was nothing more than a figment of fiction. What evidence do we have, besides the writing of Jesus own followers of His existence? And what impact does this existence, or the lack thereof, have on our faith?

What many Christians do not know, is that there is confirmation of the existence of Jesus from other writers of that era beside those of the Scriptures. Josephus, the first-century Jewish historian, speaks of Jesus life and death in two texts in his massive history, the Judean Antiquities. Some scholars have turned to rabbinic texts for historical references to Jesus. The Talmud describes an execution by crucifixion of Jesus the Nazarene and five of His disciples on Passover. Pliny the Elder, a Roman governor in the early second century wrote a letter to the emperor Trajan around 110AD to inquire about the legal status of some Christians who had been accused of crimes. Jesus, or rather "Christus," is mentioned in this letter as a man worshiped as a God by Christians. Tactus, a Roman writer and historian, also mentions Jesus as "Christus." He reports that Jesus was executed as a criminal in Judea by Pilate and that He was the founder of a "superstition" that began in Judea and had now spread to Rome. Finally, Seutonius, another Roman historian and a friend of both Pliny and Tacitus, mentions Jesus in another context of Roman persecution, this time of Jews in 49 AD during the reign of Claudius. Seutonius says that Claudius expelled Jews from Rome because they were stirred up by one, "Chrestus." We assume this is the same person as Seutonius refers.

As a practicing Jew, Christ participated in the Passover observance which was a part of His faith. At a supper before His execution He asked His followers to remember His sacrifice in addition to their participation in the Passover meal. The early Christian church observed a special time of the year to celebrate the resurrection of Christ, which became known as Easter. There was, however, much disagreement as to the credibility of such an observance since it paralleled the pagan holiday of Ishtar, the goddess of fertility (2 Corinthians 6:14-16). When the message of Christianity spread through many countries it became intertwined with pagan practices that were deeply held by some people. In an effort to soothe tensions, the church instigated so-called Christian holidays to be held at the same time in an effort to counter the pagan festivals. Many are still observed today.

The most compelling aspect to this dramatic adventure is that the final climax is yet to be written. Christ promised to return to complete His mission. The most ancient traditions among Hebrews authorities and those of the early church, have believed that the pattern of the Sabbath was fundamental. It was not only six days followed by a seventh day of rest that was holy, or six years that the land was planted, with the seventh year a "Sabbath" or rest for the land. There has been a traditional belief from Augustine to Nach-monides that after six thousand years of man's rule, there would be a thousand years of God's rule. Traditional reckoning allows 2,000 years between Adam and Abraham; 2,000 years from Abraham to Christ; and we have now entered 2,000 years since the cross. From the beginning to the end, all is connected by – a scarlet thread!

The twentieth century has been the bloodiest in human history. Signs as the year 2007 unfolds, suggests it may prove to be one of the most turbulent of modern times. All the social, economic, and political paradigms are changing. Satan is loose and having his way. We need look no further than the slaughter of 45,000,000 pre-born children, the thought of even considering sodomite marriage, an equal amount of adultery and pornography among Christians and non-Christians alike – even clergy, the legalization and escalation of gambling, lies and rampant dishonesty among our government officials, total disregard for what should be basic morality, the terrible crimes that make the news almost every day and the uncivilized method in which they are carried out, and last but in no way the least, the twisting of Scripture within our churches. The pagan world wishes they had a society relieved from the descendents of the Carpenter from Galilee who defeated death two thousand years ago. In our lifetime they may well be successful. We must remember that “Christ is alive” and pray and work that God will have mercy on us and not give them their wish, which is what we justly deserve!