

## *In the Name of Jesus*

### Prolog

#### The Principles behind the telling of this story

For fun at times, I ask people, ministers, if they can guess how many people were in Jerusalem for the Passover when Jesus died. They know people came but never thought about how many. The common guess is under 50,000. The normal number is 10 diners to a lamb. Josephus has 250,000 and 255,600 lambs, the Talmud 240,000 and 300,000. What does it take to slaughter more than 20,000 lambs an hour? Over 2,500,000 people were celebrating the Passover. The reality is far beyond what anyone imagines! The scriptures omit a great amount. "Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written."

John 21: ESV.

Would accurate knowledge make a difference? For illustration consider parallel conditions. Would it make a difference, if you thought Native Americans were still living in tepees, chasing buffalo on horses? Would you feel it was proper understanding, if you met someone who thought the Amish accurately represented the original Christians? Do you think the Hasidic Jews of today represent historic Judaism?

Our images of Jesus and his times are colored by the pictures we have seen of those events. The great works of art, Sunday School art, the movies that have been made, create in our minds false images and misunderstanding. The Medieval portrayed scenes in the dress and architecture of their times. Those who viewed them, "knew" the actual scene was different even if they could not know exactly what they were like. The images we have show a pseudo-historical image. The dress and setting is supposed to help us image the real scene but in many ways deepen our misunderstanding.

Artists limit the number of people and objects in the scene to make it easier to paint. Movies do the same, extras and large sets cost money. The images give an intimate view which is comforting, but we miss the grandeur. Jerusalem was not a small town. The events were large. The Temple platform holds 250,000 people. The Temple was 180 feet high. Jesus' trial was before the 70 members of the Sanhedrin and there were a number of others standing around. His triumphal entry on Palm Sunday is often reenacted with a few children holding palm branches. The reality could have been 50,000. This is not Sunday School art, not close to any great work of art!

Many popular ideas and mental images are incorrect. The average person has little understanding of first Century Roman - Judean cultural, economic, political or theological conditions. The rise of modern scholarship has not improved the situation. What is actually known has not brought better understanding for a number of reasons. Among them our pride of being "modern", knowing we have far advanced over the "old" primitive time of Christ. The folk on the opposite side do not want to think the account of Jesus might be historically accurate.

There are a number of reconstructions, replicas of the Temple in Jesus' day. They are all wrong. They portray the Temple Mount when it was finished in 64 AD, more than 30 years after Jesus' time.

There had been 18,000 men and 1000 draft oxen working for nearly 80 years. What Jesus saw in 30 A.D. was a grand construction site.

Some of the problems have roots in the split between the Eastern - Greek Church - Empire and the Western - Latin Church - Empire. An example: the earlier Eastern understanding of Jesus' family is different from the later Western. Some Protestants holding to scripture alone ignore the early Church Fathers, tradition and what was known by the ancient nonChristian secular records.

We do not understand the ravages of the "dark ages" and wholesale destruction of the Classical world. As a result we are blind to what did exist. Trier was a frontier city in 300 AD when Constantine ( before he was Great ) selected it as his junior co-emperor capitol. His throne room still stands, holding over 1000. The city held over 40,000. Five hundred years later Charlemagne selected nearby Aachen as the capital of the Holy Roman Empire ( Western Europe). It was a wooden stockade for about 600. The only stone building, a fairly small structure, his cathedral, still stands. He founded a school where 50 sons of nobility learned to read and write. In 1400, 1100 years after Trier, the 10th largest city in Europe was Rothenburg on the Tauber. It had 3000 within its walls. Where over a million lived in Jesus' day, in 1500, the days of Da Vinci, Raphael, Luther and Calvin, Rome. had less than Trier 1200 years before.

St. Francis of Assisi in the 1200s made the first nativity creche, stable, with Mary Joseph and infant Jesus. It was to communicate to illiterate Italian peasants. Accurately portraying the birth in Bethlehem was inconceivable. Yet this is the image that dominates our thinking today. Artists do not show the cave where Jesus was born. Only two tombs with round rolling stones are known. All the rest were blocked by square stones. Only a round stone is shown in pictures. The word translated "rolled" is also the word used for moving the square door stone.

The Christians are unaware of what is in the Jewish Talmud and Mishnah. The Scripture mentions Pharisees, Sadducees and Herodians, but the well known split between the House of Hillel and House of Shammai is ignored even though it was central to much of the situation in Jesus' day. Hillel and Shammai were the most prominent religious leaders in Jerusalem when Jesus was born. They would have known Zechariah, the miraculous birth of John the Baptist, Simeon and Anna. Neither is mentioned in the scripture.

On the Jewish side, the records are slanted. What we have is the record of Rabbinic scholars long after the destruction of the Temple. The records do not reveal the faith and practices of the average person in Jesus' day. The people later adopted the Rabbinic understanding of Judaism or assimilated into Christianity. The record we have supports the positions of the later scholars and make them normative. They either do not explain or ignore completely teachings and practices they reject. The Seder / Passover record we have is far from what was normal for a Galilean peasant in Jesus' day. It reflects a highly cultured upper class setting hundreds of years later.

We know during the two hundred years before Jesus there was a major change in piety. The construction near Jerusalem of mikvehs for ritual bathing, the use of the stone jars, the exclusion of women singers, were recent changes. This fostered practices that demonstrated greater effort, were more difficult, greater devotions to study of the "Holy Writings" and in learning the teachings of great scholars. All of this initiated changes in the attempt to be faithful to the past. It also meant that the focus became centered on the pious leader, scholar. The average people tried to follow the example and words of their leaders. It is a laudable goal, but no good deed goes unpunished. The center of the faith became the outward practices, correct words. Spirit, the attitude of the heart, mercy, righteousness, reconciliation, love were evaluated by form.

There was deliberate effort to create a divide between the faithful and the influences of the pagan world. Many felt pagan culture was taking over. Many were abandoning the old ways of their little nation and adopting the ways of the successful and powerful. The Maccabean revolt was supposed to remove the pagan evil but the later Hasemonians were immersed in pagan ways, decadent and greedy.

In the following stories there has a deliberate effort to avoid the issues between Pharisees, Sadducees and others about their theological controversies. There is much material in the historical documents and we know they played a major role in the history of the nation. There are two problems, these stories are meant for casual, non technical readers, I can not lose them with long explanations of the Pharisees, Sadducees, Sanhedrin, Levites, Priests, High Priests.

The second problem is even more severe. Determining exactly what was is very difficult. There are many books, articles, by many scholars, with various interpretations that do not match. Pharisees - set apart ones - were not average or mainstream. They were the counter culture that fought for the correct path and won. Much of what they stood for was right. They and the other groups were part theological, part political, with shifting positions and diverse membership. Almost anything was true with some person and place, nothing is true in general. It is wrong to divide them into good or bad categories. That is why I have used the term "scholars". I intend it to be a neutral term, sometimes good, sometimes bad.

The historical knowledge of the early Church is completely unlike that of the Jewish people in the same time period. The early Church documents and leaders were deliberately "mainstream", that is a good understanding for "catholic", what everywhere, by everyone, from the beginning has been taught and practiced. Apostolic succession meant a direct line of instruction, approval and authority from the Apostles and Christ. In their writings against heretics they include long quotes, so we have good knowledge of what was said and why. The heretics were those who separated themselves from the mainstream in order to, in their own opinion, correct and purify the Church to be what they thought it was supposed to be. They were rejected for rejecting the received teachings.

The physical land of Galilee and Judea radically changed. Hills have been cut down and valleys filled up. What was once very productive agricultural land in Biblical times was destroyed. The farmers were replaced by herders. The climate was no longer the same. Growing crops and trees attract rainfall. What westerners found in Palestine recently or in the crusades was nothing like what was there before. The modern state of Israel has planted millions of trees and restored the fertility of the land.

The rules of scholarship place powerful limits on what can be considered. Originally a Doctor of Theology meant a person had an accurate understanding of what was known and was able to properly transmit old truth. (Doctor means skilled teacher). Today it means the person has discovered new truths. The doctoral thesis requires the presentation of why the old has been surpassed. No credit is given for preserving and transmitting the old. The rules require the scholar to deal with the actual evidence and not speculation. Interpreting the "evidence" can be tricky. Is there evidence of King David or that the crossing of the Red Sea happened? If there is no evidence does that "prove" there was no ruler in Judea 1000 BC or that there was no exodus?

Where there is no evidence the cautious scholar cannot suggest what happened. In one sense I agree with this. But something was going on during the times for which we have no evidence. We have wonderful records of the first Jewish revolt in 70 A.D. Everyone knows about Masada. We hardly hear about the Bar Kokhba revolt against the Roman Empire in 132 CE, so nothing happened? "Modern historians have come to view the Bar-Kokhba Revolt as being of decisive historic importance. The massive destruction and loss of life occasioned by the revolt has led some scholars to date the beginning

of the Jewish diaspora from this date. They note that, unlike the aftermath of the First Jewish-Roman War chronicled by Josephus, the majority of the Jewish population of Judea was either killed, exiled, or sold into slavery and Jewish religious and political authority was suppressed. After the revolt the Jewish religious center shifted away from Judea. There was no “Josephus” for Bar-Kokhba. We have very little record for those events, so the minor first event dominates the story and twists the understanding.

We know Herod the Great was very wealthy, controlled the bureaucracy of the nation. He was an astoundingly prolific builder and had an army. What happened to his money flow and army? The income from his land and his taxes did not go to Rome. Rome kept on getting their normal share. Pilate had 6 cohorts, 3600 men to cover the area and guard the frontier. Rome considered the Chief Priest the local king. Rome did replace local kings who did not keep in line. It is never mentioned that the Chief Priest and Sanhedrin had an army and controlled the nation with great wealth through a large bureaucracy. The size of the staff and soldiers available to the governor was too small to manage the government and security of the nation. “The absence of proof is not the proof of absence.” There had to be a working government and military in addition to what we know the governor possessed! The Roman governor did keep Herod’s palaces in Caesarea and Jerusalem, and stationed soldiers in the Antonia. The gate keepers, Levites, were a paramilitary force. The soldiers who arrested Jesus were not Roman. Since only Rome had the power to execute, some Romans would have been at the cross, in addition to the local soldiers.

The Romans among themselves spoke Latin. The local people spoke Aramaic, and understood Hebrew since it was read in the Synagog. Traders used Greek as a common language. Many people got by in Greek in addition to their own tongue. The Wise men from the East spoke a version of Aramaic and should have known some Greek. The average man could read and write, many women could also. Learning to read English is tricky because the spelling is not phonetic. In those languages, if you knew what sound the letter stood for, you could read the word. Writing was on broken pieces of pottery, potshards, or on erasable wax covered wood. Paper and vellum were very expensive and almost never used.

It is not possible to find an acceptable way to express the local accents in dialog. In our modern enlightened age, it is considered insulting. Some years ago regional dialects were considered acceptable. The Galileans did not have the same accent as the Judeans. If I wrote the Galilean speech as Appalachian and Judean as standard American English, that would have been in one sense be culturally accurate but in another sense wrong.

Now with computer graphics and archeological understanding, the actual scenes can be shown. My favorite visualizations of the Temple Mount are by Leen Ritmeyer / [www.ritmeyer.com](http://www.ritmeyer.com). There are many others. They all portray the completed Temple of 64 A.D. A search on Google or Wikipedia is a good introduction to what is known. The end notes on the chapters lead to many sites for further understanding.

This is a series of stories that attempt to make an accurate portrayal of the culture and history of the times in which Jesus lived. I have filtered what I think and say through my biases and beliefs. I am convinced God is competent and His Scriptures are exactly what He wants them to be. That does not mean God acts in accordance with our present day human concepts. Luther commented that just as we know by faith alone that Jesus is both true man and true God so we know by faith alone that the Scriptures are both true work of man and true work of God. St. Augustine said, “Now against the sacrilegious and impious darlings of reason.” Human logic is flawed, it is part of our sinful nature. The measurements, the facts of Physics, quantum mechanics, relativity, are beyond logic. God’s creation, His ways are not our ways, the created universe is beyond our understanding.

No one looking at the Bible or the universe, this world, will ever be able to “prove” anything about God, in His favor or against. Nothing I write is intended to deny the meaning of the scriptures. I pray these stories may deepen the readers appreciation of what is recorded. If the reader is looking for deeper faith, then pray to be molded, shaped and used by the Spirit. Jesus said, “whoever comes to me I will never cast out.” John 6:37.

Go to my web site for more. <http://thesignofconcord.com> Email [ConcordDove@mac.com](mailto:ConcordDove@mac.com)

If the reader discovers any historical inaccuracy, please send me the corrections and evidence. Please feel free to pass it on to others. Thanks to my patient wife Lynne for repeatedly proofreading. I excel at creative spelling and punctuation.

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S.D.G.