



Chapter 21

THE MANNER OF JESUS' CRUCIFIXION

One of the greatest secrets associated with Golgotha concerns the manner in which Jesus was crucified. Almost everyone for the past 1600 years has imagined that Jesus was martyred on either a Roman or Greek type of cross or perhaps a simple stake without a crosspiece. The New Testament, however, gives information on this matter that is counter to all these suggestions. The truth is, Jesus was not killed on a cross which was a beam of timber on which were nailed one or more crosspieces, nor was it a single upright pole (without a crosspiece) with his hands brought together and nailed above his head. In this chapter we will discuss the actual way in which he was crucified.

What first must be understood is that Jesus met his death in a garden (John 19:41). Actually, the word garden in the Greek has the meaning of *orchard* or *plantation* — a place of trees. It appears that Golgotha (which the Bordeaux Pilgrim called a *monticulus* — a small hill on top of a mount) must have had trees associated with it. It was to this hill that Jesus carried his cross on which he was crucified. Many scholars today believe it is inconceivable that Jesus,

who had been subjected to extensive beatings and whippings, could have carried a fully assembled Latin cross that would have weighed 200 pounds or more. Such a heavy weight certainly has to be the case for an assembled Latin or Greek cross. But this is NOT what happened. The cross he transported was only the upper crosspiece which was nailed to a larger and more substantial support. It was to this board plank that Jesus' arms or his wrists were affixed, and what Simon of Cyrene carried the final distance to Golgotha. Such crosspieces associated with crucifixions were given a technical name in Latin. This upper part of the cross was called a *patibulum*.

When Golgotha was finally reached, Jesus then had his arms or wrists nailed to the *patibulum*. Both he and the *patibulum* were then hoisted upwards and the crosspiece was nailed to some substantial stock of wood large enough to support the person being crucified. It was also common to bend the victim's legs upwards and nail the feet to the stock of wood itself. Sometimes a wood block was attached to the main support near the midsection of the body on which the buttocks of the victim could rest.

There were also two robbers who were crucified with him. There can hardly be any doubt that the same procedure of crucifixion was adopted for them. This would mean that the two robbers were each affixed to an individual *patibulum*, and then each *patibulum* was nailed to a large stock of wood. But what kind of wooden support was this that Jesus had his *patibulum* and his feet nailed to? The Bible shows that it was something entirely different from what most people believe today. It was not a dead piece of timber. Indeed, both the apostles Peter and Paul said that Jesus was nailed to a *tree*, not to pieces of timber. He was crucified on a *living tree*.

This fact should not appear at all unreasonable considering the circumstances connected with Jesus' crucifixion. His crucifixion and those of the two robbers was a hurry-up affair. The main reason to get their executions over quickly was because the Passover of the Jews was soon approaching and it was biblical law that no

one could hang on an instrument of death beyond sundown. Indeed, scholars have recognized that it was common in times of haste to nail criminals to trees (Hastings, *Christ and the Gospels*, vol.II,p.749).

Jesus was Crucified on a Living Tree

Using a living tree as the main stock of wood for the *patibulum*s of Jesus and the two robbers gave the soldiers the advantage of not having to dig holes some five or six feet deep in order to secure three large standing poles to support the *patibulum*s of the three men. The soldiers, at first, simply nailed their arms to the *patibulum*s and then lifted each board plank up to the middle of a tree, and then each of the *patibulum*s was nailed to the tree. Finally, each of the three men had his lower legs nailed to the trunk of the tree. This was an ordinary tree like any tree found in an orchard today. And this is precisely what Peter and Paul said in the New Testament. Jesus was nailed to a tree (in Greek: *xylon*) which in this case was a *living tree*. Notice what Peter said.

“The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged *on a TREE*” (Acts 5:30).

“We are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem: whom they slew and hanged *on a TREE*” (Acts 10:39).

“Who his own body bare our sins in his own body *on the TREE*” (I Peter 2:24).

The apostle Paul spoke the same thing.

“They took him down *from the TREE*” (Acts 13:29).

In all these instances *the tree* was a living tree. Jesus himself said at the very time of his crucifixion: For if they do these things in (dative: *with*) a *green TREE*, what shall be done in (dative: *with*) the dry? (Luke 23:31). This indication shows that Jesus was crucified *with* (or *by means of*) a living tree (Greek: *xylon*). It was the instrument by which he was executed. Paul also emphasized this

fact in Galatians 3:13.

“Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, ‘Cursed is every one that hangeth *on a TREE.*’”

Paul was quoting Deuteronomy 21:23 where it states that the Israelites in the time of Moses were to hang the dead bodies of criminals on the bough or limbs of a tree until sundown. In no circumstances does this mean a type of crucifixion where single poles or beams with crosspieces were used to execute people. The tree in Deuteronomy meant a plain and simple tree, and in the later examples where this type of punishment was exacted by the Israelites, the trees in question were all ordinary living trees (Joshua 8:29; 10:26,27). And this must have been the same situation in the case of Jesus. He was executed in a garden (really, in an orchard of trees). In such a location it makes perfectly good sense why a tree was used by the Romans, especially since there was an urgency to get his crucifixion over in haste. As late as the time of Mohammed, it is stated in a section of the Koran speaking about punishing a criminal that “I will crucify you on the trunks of palm trees” (Koran, Sura XX,71). Indeed, people were crucified to any standing object which was near at hand that would afford support to the one being executed. Trees were the most convenient objects on which to crucify people. We are told that the proconsul of Africa punished the priests of the Saturn “by crucifying them *on the very trees of their temple*” (Tertullian, *Apologeticus*, 9:2). This method of crucifying was really the normal one, while using pieces of cut lumber (as is usually depicted) was the least used because such cut timber was not easy to come by.

But wait a moment. Have we not been told that Jesus was crucified on a *stauros* (the KJV always translates this Greek word by the English word “cross,” but I will retain in this book the transliterated word *stauros*). The New Testament usage, however, does not demand the Latin type of cross (or any other type of cross made up

of dry pieces of timber in some way nailed together). The Greek word *stauros* by the first century had come to have a variety of meanings. The original significance of the word *stauros* meant simply an upright pole or a stake. Like today, even we may speak of a pole to which one tethers an animal. In such a case we almost always think of a single stake secured to the ground. But if we should say telephone pole, we could think of a single stake or a pole with one, two or even five crosspieces attached to it. Even our English word pole can have several similar meanings. The Greek word *stauros* fits into the same category.

Words Change Meanings

The fact is, words change meanings over the years and can often take on opposite significations. For example, if a person were going to England from the United States one might fly by airplane or sail by ship. But if one wishes to sail today (in 99% of the cases), one means to go on a vessel that has no sails at all. Indeed, in naval terminology (to use another such word that indicates a change of meaning) a captain of a ship may say he is going full steam ahead when he is actually burning diesel fuel or nuclear power.

These changes of the meanings of words (and hundreds more could be given) are examples of what happened to the Greek word *stauros* from its earlier usages to those of the first century. Remarkably, however, there are some religious denominations who demand that Jesus was crucified on a simple upright pole or stake because that was the original meaning of the word *stauros*. Yes, that was the first meaning but for such interpreters to say that *stauros* had that exclusive significance in the first century is to deny the abundant literary evidence which shows it did not. If they should insist on the original meaning for all usages in the New Testament, then they should also (to be consistent) demand that anyone who says he sails to England today must in all circumstances go on a *sailing vessel*.

Actually, the word *stauros* in the first century could refer to all kinds of executionary impalements in which individuals were nailed or tied to *any* supportive timbers or trees for judgment. Like today, we may call a very severe judge a hanging judge (if he is prone to issue the death penalty without mercy), yet the state in which the judge presides could use the gas chamber, lethal injection or the electric chair for its means of executing convicted murderers. There is an old saying in the interpretation of words within their historical contexts. It is: An *ounce* of usage is worth a whole *pound* of etymology. How true this principle is.

In the case of the word *stauros* in first century usage this is certainly the case. It had at least three different meanings in the New Testament alone (which the KJV simply translates “cross”). Note that the board plank which supported the arms of Jesus (called the *patibulum* in Latin) was called a *stauros* (Luke 23:26). But it had a further meaning. The actual pole or the tree trunk on which the *patibulum* was nailed was also called a *stauros* (John 19:19). And the complex together (both *patibulum* and the bough of the tree were reckoned as a single executionary device) was called a *stauros* (John 19:25).

The Stauros was a Living Tree

This means that the living tree on which Jesus was crucified was known itself as a *stauros*. In almost all situations where quickness was demanded for a crucifixion, it was common to nail or to tie the victims to living trees. As a matter of fact, even as early as the fifth century B.C., we find that the word for gallows in the Book of Esther on which Haman and his sons were hanged (Esther 5:14 and seven more instances), the Hebrew simply means a tree that was fifty cubits high — a single tree — which the Greek translation of the third century B.C. rendered as being a tree (*xylon*) on which people were impaled (and the LXX translators used the root word *stauros* to describe the procedure of impalement) (see Esther 7:9).

In a literary sense, using the word *stauros* (or its derivatives) to describe the executing of individuals on a *tree* (*xylon*) was not an uncommon practice. This was especially the case when the shortness of time was a part of the procedure. Crucifying people to living trees was the easiest way to get the task done since it required less work and less time for the executioners. Recall that Pilate, up to the last moment, was trying to release Jesus. There was no lengthy trial that would have allowed time to dig holes into which timber beams could be placed and then crosspieces (*patibulum*s) nailed to the poles. The quickness of the crucifixion was made a cardinal point in the New Testament since the Jews wanted the crucifixion of Jesus to be over quickly because the Passover was just on the horizon and they wanted to be able to take of the Passover without being defiled with dead bodies (John 19:31). This is one of the reasons why the executioners decided to crucify Jesus and the two robbers to a living tree, and they did.

Early Christian Authorities knew Jesus was Crucified on a Tree

The early Christians who lived after the apostles were fully aware of this fact that the *stauros* on which Jesus was crucified was actually a *living tree*. The author of Barnabas (who wrote in the late first or early second century) consistently called the *stauros* of Jesus a *tree* (5:13; 7:5; 8:5; 12:1,5). The descriptive context which he provides shows he meant a *living tree*. In mentioning the ritual of the Red Heifer, Barnabas said that the priests tied a crimson thread to a *tree* which represented the *stauros* of Jesus (8:1,5). He said that Psalm 1:3 (He shall be like *the tree* planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth fruit in season, and his leaf shall not wither) signified the *stauros* on which Jesus was crucified (11:1,8). Even the top crosspiece that is found in the letter T was acknowledged by Barnabas as a *stauros* apart from the stem that supports it, and even the evangelist Luke himself said the same thing by calling the *patibulum* which Jesus (and Simon of Cyrene) carried to the

crucifixion site a *stauros* (Luke 23:26). Barnabas stated that the incident of Moses in making the brass serpent showed Moses nailing the serpent to a *tree*, not to an upright pole (12:1,2), and Jesus himself said that this incident was analogous to his own crucifixion (John 3:14).

More Evidence the Stauros was a Tree

There is even more evidence of this recognition in the early second century. Ignatius also referred to the *stauros* as a tree, and was alive and that it even bore fruit (*Smyr.* 1:2) and that it had branches (*Trall.* 11). In the writings of Ignatius he said it was believed that the instrument of death on which Jesus was crucified represented the Tree of Life which was mentioned in the Book of Revelation (Revelation 2:7; 22:2,14), and of course that Tree of Life was a living *xylon* (tree) just as the apostles Peter and Paul said Jesus was crucified on a similar *xylon* (tree). There is no doubt that Christians up to the middle of the second century knew Jesus was crucified on a literal tree. Melito of Sardis consistently said the cross of Jesus was a *tree*. He said: Just as from a tree came sin, so also from a tree came salvation (*New Fragment*, III.4).

There are numerous other references from early Christian writings that refer to the *stauros* on which Jesus was placed as a *living tree*. But it is not only in literature that we find this fact. It was also common in early drawings of the crucifixion to depict branches and leaves as protruding from the bough of the *stauros*. The *stauros* of Jesus was shown as a living symbol which represented life itself.

“Early Christian art indicates a close relationship between the tree of life and the cross. The cross of Christ, the wood of suffering and death, is for Christians a *tree of life*. In the tomb paintings of the 2nd century it is thus depicted for the first time as the symbol of victory over death. It then recurs again and again. The idea that the *living* trunk of the cross *bears twigs and leaves* is a common motif in Christian antiquity” (Kittel, *Theological Dictionary*, Vol.V, pp.40.41 italics mine).

Three Individuals Crucified on One Tree

There is another important point that must be made to make the story of Jesus' crucifixion properly understood by us of modern times, and it is also very different from what most people today have imagined. It may be surprising but the apostle John shows that Jesus and the two robbers were crucified together on ONE TREE, not on three separate trees. Notice what he recorded.

“The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies [note the plural, BODIES] should not remain on the STAUROS [singular] on the sabbath day (for that day was an high day), besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. Then came the soldiers, and brake the legs of the first, and of the other crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs” (John 19:31-33).

These verses tell us very much. They show that there were three men crucified ON ONE STAUROS. This is even indicated in the Greek word *sunstaurothentos* found in John 19:32. The fact is, it not only means that the two robbers were simply with him, but both of them were crucified together with him. And indeed they were together with him on the same *stauros*—a single living tree.

Even breaking the legs of the two robbers shows that Jesus and the two malefactors were affixed to one tree. Note that the Scripture shows that one robber was on one side of Jesus and the other robber on the opposite side. Then two robbers were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left (Matthew 27:38). If one robber was crucified on a separate cross on Jesus' left side (as is normally depicted), and the other robber on another cross on his right (so that there were three crosses placed side by side with one another with Jesus situated in the middle), we then have a major problem with the deaths of the two robbers. This is because the soldiers killed first the two robbers and last of all they came to Jesus in the middle to slay him. Being in the middle should have made Jesus the second to be killed.

A Major Problem Acknowledged

It was this very circumstance that caused Dr. Bullinger (in his *Companion Bible*) to reckon that the Bible indicated, at least this is the way the texts read to him, that there were actually four others besides Jesus who were crucified that day. He thought that the Bible was showing that there were two others on each side of Jesus who were crucified with him. Here was Bullinger's reasoning. Since the New Testament called those crucified with Jesus both robbers (Matthew 27:38) and also malefactors (criminals) (Luke 23:32), Bullinger came to the conclusion that there were two malefactors and also two robbers. This is why Bullinger believed the two malefactors on one side had their legs broken first and then the soldiers came to Jesus in the midst of the two malefactors and two robbers. But there is no need for such an interpretation (though Bullinger's suggestion was ingenious). Actually, all robbers are criminals (malefactors), but it is not true that all criminals are robbers. Luke simply used the generic term malefactors (criminals) to refer to the two robbers who were crucified with Jesus.

However, Bullinger had a real point. How could soldiers first break the legs of the two robbers and then come to Jesus who was in the midst of them? The answer is simple. Since we are told by the apostle John (being an eyewitness to the scene) that all three were crucified on ONE *stauros* (that is, *a single tree*), it is easy to see how the soldiers broke the legs of the robber on Jesus' right side (who had his back to Jesus and was located on the northeast side of him) and then they broke the legs of the robber on Jesus' left side (who also had his back to Jesus but located on the southeast side of him). So, proceeding from the northeast side of the tree of crucifixion, the soldiers killed the first robber, went to the southeast side and killed the second robber, but they then came to Jesus who was facing (let us say) westward towards his Father's Temple. When they reached Jesus they found him dead already. All of this makes perfectly good sense as to what happened.

Three Men Crucified on One Stauros

This factor is important to show that the apostle John wants his readers to know that the three men were nailed to *one tree* (a *single stauros* — see John 19:31). These indications show that the traditions of three Latin type crosses that were associated with the Church of the Holy Sepulchre on the west side of Jerusalem have nothing to do with the real crucifixion of Jesus. When Judas Quiriacus revealed to Helena the three crosses (with Pilate's tablet, the sponge and reed that were supposedly those associated with Jesus), he was presenting to the Christian world one of the greatest hoaxes ever devised. The Bible itself and the early Christians of the second century state that Jesus was crucified on a *living tree*, not on some dead Roman crosses. And besides that, the two robbers were crucified with Jesus *on the same tree*.

This fact seems illustrated in later works. For what it's worth, the Arabic Infancy Gospel has Jesus prophesying to his mother at a young age: "in thirty years, mother, the Jews will crucify me in Jerusalem, and those two robbers *will be fastened to the stauros WITH ME*, Titus on my right [the supposed name of the first robber] and Dumachus on my left" (Hennecke-Schneemelcher, *The New Testament Apocrypha*, vol.I, p.408). And in a work titled Jesus' Descent into Hell, one of the robbers is reported to have said: "Truly, I was a robber, and the Jews hanged me *on a stauros WITH my Lord Jesus Christ*" (*ibid.*, p.480 emphasizes mine in both quotes). Whatever reliability one wishes to place on these later (and Gnostic) works is only of academic interest, but we have the certain word of the apostle John himself that Jesus and the two robbers were indeed crucified to one *stauros*, and that *stauros* was a living tree. And though some scholars may wish to see in the *singular stauros* of the apostle John a simple figure of speech (in which the singular might be stretched to signify the plural), I will let them argue the matter with John. As for me, within the grammar of John 19:31 is the clear statement that Jesus and the two robbers (all three

of them) were crucified *on one stauros*, and it makes perfectly good sense that this was the case.

Since all three of those men who were crucified that morning on the Mount of Olives were crucified on a single tree, it is an absurd proposition to imagine that all three men were nailed to one Latin or Greek cross (made up of dry wooden timbers nailed together). How could two robbers be nailed to ONE *stauros* (as John said they were) with Jesus nailed to the same *stauros* and at the same time Jesus is described as being in the middle of the robbers? Each of the victims would have had to display some unusual bodily contortions to accomplish such a feat.

But away with such nonsense. Actually, the Holy Scriptures state that Jesus and the two robbers were crucified together *on one tree* (and anyone should realize that a normal size tree would be large enough to allow ample room for all three to be on the same *stauros*). And this is exactly what happened. Jesus and the two robbers were executed on one living tree near the summit of the Mount of Olives. Recall again what Melito said in the middle of the second century: "Just as from a tree came sin [in the Garden of Eden], so also from a tree came salvation [at Jesus' crucifixion]" (*New Fragment*, III.4). Indeed, there are many references in early second and third century Christian writings to show that it was a literal tree on which Jesus met his death in Jerusalem (*cf.* Danielou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity*, pp.275-288).

The Stauros was a Literal Living Tree

There are some, however, who might question the crucifixion of Jesus as being on a living tree (*xylon*). This is because the word *xylon* sometimes means a dry piece of wood (a stock or stave) and this is even the case in the New Testament (Matthew 26:47; Acts 16:24; Revelation 18:12). One might think that the word *xylon* could mean, after all, that it was on some dry timber beams that Jesus was crucified.

True enough, if we had no context in the New Testament regarding the events of the crucifixion to show that *xylon* means a green tree (as it does most often), then we might have to consider the possibility that the *stauros* was made up of some dry pieces of timber. But, we have a cardinal reference by Jesus himself, right in the context of the crucifixion scene, that the *xylon* on which Jesus was crucified was a green and living tree which had roots in the ground. At the very time Jesus was being led up to the crucifixion site, he said to the women following him: "If they do these things *in* (Greek dative: *with*) a green tree (*xylon*), what will occur in (Greek dative: *with*) the dry tree?" (Luke 23:31). Jesus was saying that it was *with* (or *by means of*) a green tree (*xylon*) that he would meet his death.

Jesus was Crucified on a Green Tree (a Living Tree)

This reference in Luke's Gospel shows that the instrument of Jesus' execution was a green tree (*xylon*) and not with some dry pieces of timber nailed together in the form of a Latin or Greek cross (or any other configuration of dry timber beams). Jesus was truly crucified on *a living tree*, and in the next chapter it will be shown why this was absolutely necessary to fulfill the symbolic teaching of the Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament which predicted the coming of the true Messiah to Israel.

But what happened to *that* tree on which Jesus was impaled? The Jewish historian Josephus said that all trees around Jerusalem (and certainly on the Mount of Olives) were cut down by Titus the Roman general in the A.D.66-70 war with the Romans (*War VI.1*). That destruction would have put an end to that tree if it had continued to exist to that time. But did that tree remain on the Mount of Olives for the next 40 years following Jesus' crucifixion? There is reason to believe that the tree itself was destroyed soon after the burial of Jesus.

It should be remembered that Jesus was charged by the Jewish authorities with the most heinous of crimes, that of blasphemy

(Matthew 26:65). This meant that Jesus was looked on by the people as accursed of God and this is exactly how the apostle Paul described him (Galatians 3:13). Paul's reference was to Deuteronomy 21:22,23 where it states that such an accursed person defiled even the soil (the very land) where the execution of an accursed person took place. This defilement also applied to the tree on which a person was hanged. The apostle Paul said that the tree (the *stauros*) was itself reckoned a shame (Hebrews 12:2) and he called the crosspiece (Latin: *patibulum*) the reproach (Hebrews 13:13). All the instruments were accursed because they came in contact with the accursed one.

The Old Testament Demanded that Jesus be Hanged on a Tree

The essential teaching on how to cleanse the land of such accursedness is found in Deuteronomy 21:22,23, and in the previous verse 21 it says this purging was to be done by burning (Hebrew: *bahgar*). In the Old Testament example of such purging, it was thought necessary to burn the possessions of such an accursed one because the abominable sin of the person was even transferred to the things owned by the sinner (since he had touched them and this reckoned even his possessions accursed). This was the case with the things belonging to Achan who sinned so grievously in the time of Joshua (Joshua 7:15,24-26). What happened was that Achan himself was killed (with his children and animals) and all his accursed things were burnt up together with him. This practice of utter destruction was considered the only way to purify the land of Israel from such defilements.

With this as the cardinal example of what happened to an accursed one and the accursed things which he had touched, it must be that the tree on which Jesus was crucified was consigned to be burnt to ashes. After all, it was reckoned a shame (itself accursed). To keep the land from being polluted, Jesus had to be destroyed before sundown and the accursed *stauros* had to be burnt up so that

no person could ever touch it again. The only thing of Jesus that was considered worth saving was his cloak, but it must be noted that it was the Roman soldiers who cast lots for the garment since they had no scruples about Jewish matters.

What the Jewish authorities wanted to do was to take the dead body of Jesus and the accursed (shameful) tree and burn them up together just as the Israelites did with Achan in the Old Testament. This is the reason that Joseph of Arimathea gathered up courage and made a daring entrance into the presence of Pilate (in a sense of urgency) in order to gain Jesus' body for burial before the authorities could burn it to ashes (Mark 15:43). Had not Pilate given Joseph of Arimathea charge over Jesus' dead body, it would indeed have been consumed in the flames along with the tree on which he was crucified.

Actually, there was a prophecy that many people at the time interpreted as referring to the Messiah and his death. It showed that the tree and the person on the tree would be destroyed together. Though the original teaching of this Old Testament prophecy seemed to refer to the prophet Jeremiah, later Christians came to feel that it was a direct prophecy of what happened to Jesus at his crucifixion. The prophecy is found in Jeremiah 11:19.

“But I as a lamb that is brought to the slaughter; and I knew not that they had devised devices against me, saying, Let us destroy the tree *with* the fruit thereof, and let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name may be no more remembered” (italics mine — the subsidiary word *ox* in the King James Version is not in the original Hebrew).

The Anglican Commentary (London: 1875) gives an interesting quote from Jerome in the fourth century about this very verse.

“Jerome well says on this verse; ‘All the churches agree in understanding that under the person of Jeremiah these things are said of Christ. For he is the lamb brought to the slaughter that opened not its mouth. The tree is his cross, and the bread [fruit] his body: for he says himself, I am the bread that came down from heaven. And

of him they purposed to cut him off from the land of the living that his name should no more be remembered'" (vol.V, p.395).

And though later Christians interpreted Jeremiah 11:19 in various ways, it is interesting that the Hebrew made one think that the tree WITH the fruit [the body] were prophesied to be destroyed together. This is a most important factor in our present discussion. While the prophecy (acknowledged by Christians as referring to Jesus) has the tree of Jesus' crucifixion *destroyed* WITH Jesus (and this would seem to mean that both would be consumed *together* — perhaps in a burning as in the case of Achan), we know that Joseph of Arimathea was able, at the last moment, to rescue Jesus' body from such a fate. But this biblical reference still shows that the tree itself was *destroyed*. And typically, in the judgment rendered by the Sanhedrin against Jesus, it could be reckoned that Jesus was destroyed with the tree (at least he should have been destroyed *with* the tree) had not Joseph of Arimathea rescued his body from the flames. The prophecy of Jeremiah 11:19, as understood in the original Hebrew (and interpreted as referring to Jesus and the tree on which he was crucified), is further proof that early Christians knew that the tree itself was not spared from destruction.

The Nonsense that Followed Constantine

Yet after the time of Constantine many Christians began to believe that the cross escaped destruction (including the two crosses of the robbers) and that it was preserved in a miraculous way in order for it to become a relic in later times. Paulinus of Nola said:

"It is certain that if it [the cross] would have fallen into the hands of the Jews (who were taking every precaution to crush belief in Jesus), it would inevitably have been broken into pieces and burnt" (*Letter 31*).

But Paulinus thought that the cross of Jesus and those of the robbers in some way were taken immediately away by Christians and hidden near the site of Jesus' tomb. Paulinus did not explain why Christians thought it necessary to preserve the robbers' crosses as

well. He also believed that as the decades passed, all recollection of where the crosses were buried passed from the knowledge of Christians until they were discovered by Helena the queen mother when the Temple of Venus was being cleared in order to build the Church of the Holy Sepulchre (*Letter 31*).

The Flagrant Hoaxes Perpetrated by Later Christians

All of these late fourth century stories about the hiding of the crosses of Jesus and the robbers, could have been put to rest as hoaxes if those later Christians would simply have paid attention to the New Testament revelation that the centurion and the others around the crucifixion site were able to see the curtain of the Temple tear in two. Such an indication alone is enough to jettison the *western* Golgotha discovered at the Shrine of Venus as even being a contender for the true site because such an occurrence could only have been viewed from near the summit of the Mount of Olives. And had they read (and believed) the apostles Peter and Paul that Jesus was actually crucified on *a living tree* (and that Jesus and the robbers were executed on a single tree), they would also have been spared the nonsense that Judas Quiriacus was foisting off on Helena, Constantine and the Christian world.

But with Constantine having seen the cross in the sky before the battle of Milvian Bridge and subsequently identifying the Shrine of Venus with the site of Jesus' crucifixion (with the use of visions and dreams and in association with the so-called supernatural revelations shown to his mother Helena), both Helena and Constantine became prime targets for Judas Quiriacus to pull off his subterfuge. The capstone for accepting all these hoaxes, however, must have come when Cyril (then bishop of Jerusalem) said that all the city saw a great cross in the sky stretching from new Golgotha to the Mount of Olives. This parhelion of the sun (on May 7th, A.D.350) was interpreted by the Christian authorities in Jerusalem as a wonderful sign from God that vindicated the newly discovered *western* site for Jesus' passion. Visions, dreams and signs had won the day.

And from that time until now the world has been honoring the wrong spot for Jesus' crucifixion. Most people have also accepted the wrong type of *stauros* by embracing the legitimacy of the Roman type of crosses that Judas Quiriacus unearthed for Helena. However, the actual *stauros* of Jesus was a living tree which was growing in the ground near the southern summit of the Mount of Olives.