

The Death of the Stonemason Jesus

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One of many poor translations in the King James version of the Bible is a phrase tied to our Savior's vocation with his earthly father Joseph in Nazareth. In Matthew 13:35 we read, "Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas?" According to many Bible scholars, translator's should have used "**stonemason**" instead of "carpenter."

As a young man Jesus worked alongside his mortal father with enduring **stone**, not wood. Rather than saws and nails, he shaped hard **stone** with chisels and hammers, and with the compass and square. The city of Nazareth, the place Jesus grew up, was the place of an important **stone** quarry, one still in use today. It is a desert city of stone, not a place of lush green forests. When our Lord taught, He often used terms common to the craft of **stonemasonry**, not carpentry. We know He was born in a **stone** cave, wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in **stone** manger made for animals there, then buried at the end of His life in another **stone** cave, once again wrapped in the swaddling bands of those destined for the grave. He rose in the resurrection conquering sin and the bands of death for all of us. The great **stone** rolled away from the tomb was evidence of this.

One of the accusations against Him at His trial was that He claimed He could tear down the massive **stone** temple of Herod and then build it again in three days. What He said was, though they might kill Him, He would raise His body - His temple up - on the third day. He would live again. Christ said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19).

References to Christ with wood are very limited in scripture, whereas those to **stone** are plentiful. He referred to Himself as, "the **stone** which the builders rejected" in Psalm 118. He quoted this Psalm at the Last Supper, just before he went to Gethsemane the night before His crucifixion.

He was and is the chief **cornerstone** (Ephesians 2:20).

He stated, "But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a **millstone** were hanged about his neck, and *that* he were drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matthew 18:6).

He gave a new name to the earthly leader over the church in the New Testament, one tied to the firmness and stability of **stone**, and one tied to the revelation he would be given of Christ. He said, "And I say also unto thee, That thou art **Peter** (Cephas), and upon this **rock** I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). As a *seer* and prophet, Peter would receive the word of God and lead the church with it. He may have possessed a *seer stone* for this purpose. We are promised one as well (D&C 130:10).

Sitting on the Mount of Olives with His most trusted followers the Lord prophesied that all the **stones** of the great temple would eventually be thrown down, not one of them left upon another. He stated, "verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one **stone** upon another, that shall not be thrown down" (Matthew 24:2).

During His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, Jewish leaders asked Him to quiet the crowd who were shouting praises to Him as Israel's King. Luke tells us, "And when he was come nigh, even now at the descent of the mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen; Saying, Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest. And some of the Pharisees from among the multitude said unto him, Master, rebuke thy disciples. And he answered and said unto them, I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the **stones** would immediately cry out" (Luke 17:37-40).

Many were eager to **stone** the woman caught in adultery. Christ told them, "he who is without sin among you, let him first cast a **stone** at her." They then departed. Speaking to the woman, Christ said, "Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more" (see John 8:3-11).

Christ escaped a number of times when they tried to **stone** Him too (John 8:99, 10:31, 11:8). It was not yet His time. John stated, "Then took they up **stones** to cast at him: but Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by" (John 8:59). There were plans afoot, however - to do so later. He would not escape this time. He would pay the price for His crimes under the Law God gave them.

Stones at the Lord's Crucifixion

The three parts of our Lord's great sacrifice, His atonement, burial, and resurrection also had ties to **stones**. Jewish leaders and other zealous ones like Paul (prior to his conversion) tried to **stone** Jesus on at least three occasions (John 8:99, 10:31, 11:8). John records that before the Lord went to Jerusalem His disciples warned Him of this desire, asking Him, "Master, the Jews of late sought to **stone** thee; and goest thou thither [to Jerusalem] again?" (John 11:8). Three chapters earlier, after Christ had publically proclaimed His divinity, John stated that, "they take up **stones** to cast at him: but Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by" (John 8:59). It simply was not yet time for Christ's death. In the Talmud we read of plans to **stone** Jesus forty days before it may have finally occurred - while he hung on the cross or tree.

"On the eve of Passover Yshu the Nazarean [Hebrew for Jesus the Nazarean] was *hanged* [crucified on a "tree"]. For *forty days* before the execution took place, a herald went forth and cried, '*He is going forth to be stoned*' because he has practiced *sorcery* and enticed Israel to *apostasy* [He was also accused of *blasphemy*]. Any one who can say anything in his favour, let him come forward and plead on his behalf. But since nothing was brought forward in his favour he was *hanged* [on a tree] the eve of Passover" (Talmud, Sanhedrin 43a).

At the appointed time of Passover, when innocent lambs were slayed throughout Jerusalem, Jesus, as the Lamb of God went to the Holy City knowing full well what would happen. He knew His mission was to redeem man by fulfilling all righteousness in obedience to the Law He gave Moses on Sinai, *and* to fulfill prophecy. Evidence shows that our Lord may have had **stones** thrown at Him by those who hated Him the most during the six long hours He hung on the Roman cross. Jewish leaders also wanted a part in His death, and according to *their* law. Execution by **stoning**, with *hanging on a tree* thereafter, was a *requirement* in the Mosaic Law (Lev. 24:13-16; Deut. 21:19-23), the Law our Lord gave them. He came to fulfill it completely (Mat. 5:17-18; Alma 34:13-14).

Christ was judged worthy of death for *blasphemy*, *apostasy*, and *sorcery* in Hebrew law, and *treason* and *sedition* in Roman law. His execution took place outside "the camp of Israel" just beyond the temple's far eastern boundary, just past its third altar and *gate* – the place of *judgment* (Ex. 32:26). "All the congregation" took part in it. Those who hated Him, the Jewish leaders, the average person, and even strangers could, and were in fact *required* - to participate in His death sentence personally. The **stoning** and *hanging in a tree* pattern is evident in a number of Bible scriptures, and in 3 Nephi 4:28. Bold and italics are added to them hereafter.

"And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Bring forth him that hath cursed [speaking blasphemy] *without the camp*; and let **all** that heard *him* lay their hands upon his head, and let **all the congregation stone him**. And thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel, saying, Whosoever curseth his God shall bear his sin. *And he that blasphemeth the name of the LORD, he shall surely be put to death, and all the congregation shall certainly stone him: as well the stranger, as he that is born in the land, when he blasphemeth the name of the LORD, shall be put to death*" (Lev. 24:13-16).

He that was guilty was to brought "out unto the elders of his city, and unto *the gate* of his place...And **all the men of his city shall stone** him with **stones**, *that he die*...And if a man have committed a *sin worthy of death*, and he be to be put to death, and *thou hang him on a tree*: His body shall *not* remain all night upon the tree, but thou shalt in any wise *bury him that day*; (for he that is hanged is accursed of God;) that thy *land* be not defiled, which the Lord thy God giveth thee for an inheritance" (Deut. 21:19-23).

Note also in two statements by John that it appears the Jewish leaders asked Pilate, and were given permission by him, to execute Christ *according to their law* - while our Lord hung on the cross. He could no longer escape.

“When the chief priests therefore and officers saw him, they cried out, saying, Crucify him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Take ye him, and crucify him: for I find no fault in him. The Jews answered him, *We have a law, and by our law* he ought to die [by stoning], because he made himself the Son of God” (John 19:6-7).

“Then said Pilate unto them, Take ye him, and *judge him according to your law*. The Jews therefore said unto him, It is not lawful for us to put any man to death: That the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled, which he spake, signifying *what death* he should die” (John 18:31-32).

Pilate wanted to appease the Jewish leaders to avoid trouble. Though he didn't want to execute Christ, Jewish leaders forced his hand, as we just saw in John 19:6-7. This made Pilate “afraid.” He finally allowed the Jewish leaders to *judge Christ according to their law* (John 18:7). Pilate then “gave sentence that it should be *as they required*” (Luke 23:23-24). In Mark 15:15 we read that that Pilate was “*willing to content the people*” [appeasement]. This meant not death, but the manner of it as required by Mosaic Law - **stoning** while He hung on the tree. Matthew informs us that Pilate finally, “washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: *see ye to it.*” A Mount of Cursing execution for Jesus, “*according to their law*” appeased the Jewish leaders (this was the southern most portion of the Mount of Olives). Pilate consented to it. History thus reveals that His execution was done according to both Mosaic *and* Roman law. For more on the fulfillment of both of their laws, and the necessary geography of the Atonement according to it, see Seven Heavenly Witnesses, by the author.

Note the specific requirements of Mosaic Law executions relative to stoning (Deut. 16:18 & Lev. 24:16-23).

1. Capital crimes like *blasphemy, apostasy, and sorcery* each **required** death by **stoning**, with the victim then *hung in a tree* thereafter. Christ's death had ties to all three of these capital crimes. He was hung on the tree first by the Romans and their law, then stoned according to Jewish law.
2. Stoning (and the slaying of the Passover lamb) was done by *all, the whole congregation* of Israel.
3. Executions were to be done at the “*gate*” of the last or third tier of sacred space (the place of judgment), which was just beyond or “*outside the camp of Israel*”, so as not to defile the sacred space of the temple by death. The area near the Miphkad Altar on the Mount of Cursing was this “appointed place” for executions in Jerusalem, the place of Stephen's stoning, the first martyr in the church (Acts 7:58).
4. The “accursed” and the *things* tied to his execution (such as the “cross”) were then to be taken down, burned, and then buried before sundown, that the land not be defiled by them.

Professional Roman soldiers began their normally long, slow capital punishment - by crucifixion. It was designed to lengthen out torture, while providing complete humiliation for the condemned, who was perhaps naked or mostly so. It was also completed “*outside the city*”, near a main thoroughfare into Jerusalem from the east (*the road to Jericho*), which came over Olivet and into the Holy City. This form of public humiliation and execution provided the full effect, control over the people - a deterrent to further crime. During the six hours of our Savior's execution (9 am to 3 pm), Jewish leaders and others passing by on this main road into Jerusalem could have easily picked up a few **stones** and thrown them at Him, tearing the flesh on the front portions of His body. He would not escape this time. As we have seen “all the congregation” including “strangers” were required to participate. Matthew tells us that the Jewish leaders *were* in fact there (Mat. 27:41). “All the congregation” may have ended Christ's torture prematurely in the stoning, as the two beside Him remained alive without it. The gospel writer Mark said Pilate “*marveled*” that Christ was “*already dead*” (Mark 15:44). His death was officially carried out by the Romans, perhaps so they would take the blame, though the Jewish leaders certainly had a hand in it. In addition to fulfillment of law *and* prophecy, is there other evidence of Christ's stoning by passers-by while He hung on the tree? The answer is yes. In addition to fulfilling *Mosaic Law*, **stoning** also appears to have fulfilled *prophecy* in the following seven examples.

1. The whole congregation participating in the Passover meal were also to participate in *killing* the Passover lamb (Ex. 12:6). Christ was the Passover lamb killed this day, killed by “the whole congregation” via **stoning**.
2. David prophesied of our Lord's death. He was also a type for Christ. Pursued by his wicked son Absalom,

who tried to usurp his throne and **stone** him, David escaped to the Mount of Olives and there set up an altar and prayed during his most difficult time as Israel's leader (2 Sam. 16:5-14). It was there that David wrote Psalm 22. The first words of this important Psalm were quoted by Christ while He hung on the tree. "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Later in this Psalm, David prophesied, "For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have enclosed me: they *pierced my hands and my feet...*they look and **stare upon me...**I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of *the congregation* will I praise thee" (Psalm 22:16-17 & 22 italics added).

3. One reason many *starred* at the Lord was because he was so *marred* and *bruised*. Isaiah prophesied that the suffering servant would be "*marred*" beyond human recognition. He stated, that "many were astonished at thee; his visage was *so marred more than any man*, and *his form* more than the sons of men. So shall he sprinkle [His blood] many nations; the kings shall ***shut their mouths at him***: for *that* which *had not been told them* shall they see; and *that* which they had not heard ***shall they consider***" (Isaiah 52:14-15, bold and italics added). Few have considered that Christ may have been stoned while hung in a tree.

4. Impalement on a tree with nails through hands, wrists, and feet are severe, but they do not cause disfigurement sufficient for Him to be "*marred more than any man.*" **Stoning**, with small, sharp stones aimed mercilessly at the Lord's face could. In the next chapter Isaiah adds that He was not only, "*wounded* for our transgressions" [in Gethsemane], and "*bruised* for our iniquities" [when stoned on the "tree"], but "the *chastisement* of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes [in the scourging] we are healed" (Isa. 53:5, italics added). All the congregation of Israel participated in his marring, pain, and suffering, including us - for our sins added to His pain, at least in Gethsemane. The *tearing of His flesh* in these three ways is one reason bread is *torn* in the Sacrament, a sacred ordinance where we are mercifully healed. The breaking of bones with larger stones is one good reason against potential stoning.

5. Like David, Paul was also a type for Christ, one of His most valiant Apostles. He had participated in the **stoning** of various Christians until he was converted by the Lord Himself. Paul said that he bore the marks of Christ in his body (Gal. 6:17). Like Christ he was scourged, five different times for the testimony of Jesus, with 39 stripes each time. He said he was also **stoned** (2 Cor. 11:24). In Hebrews 10 he suggests that his own flesh was *marred* or *torn* like the Master's, and like the temple's *torn* curtain (see verses 19-20). This "*marring*" is thought to have damaged his vision, though it wasn't as severe as mentioned in Galatians 4:13-15, where eyes are "plucked out". In Psalm 38:10, David stated that the light of his eyes was "gone", a lament for personal sin.

6. Thirty pieces of silver was the bribe money used to betray Jesus (Mat. 27:3). When an ox pushed a servant, the master was given a ransom price of 30 shekels of silver, the offending ox then **stoned** (Ex. 21:32).

7. Christ prophesied of His own death. He was sent by the Father to redeem all who would repent. During His last few days He gave the parable of the Wicked Husbandman (Jewish leaders). In it the king's servants, and finally the king's own *son* were sent into the vineyard to call the people to repentance. They were taken and **stoned**. In this same parable our Savior stated that *He was* "**the stone that the builders rejected**" (Mat. 23:37; Mark 12:4; Luke 20:13-19). Christ was the *son* and the **stone** or *seer* that was sent into the vineyard. He stated:

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, *thou* that killest the prophets, and **stonest them which are sent unto thee**, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under *her* wings, and ye would not!" (Mat. 23:37, bold & italics added).

Our Lord then addressed the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem, its every **stone** thrown down (Mat. 24:2). He then concluded with the parable of the Ten Virgins (Mat. 25). It seems every facet of our Lord's life was touched by **stones**, from His birth in a cave, where he was placed in a **stone** manger and wrapped in swaddling clothes, to His death by **stones** at the crucifixion. Finally he was buried in a cave tomb. His glorious resurrection occurred on the third day, the **stone** rolled away from the tomb entrance. In between these important events were many references to **stone**, His vocation as a young man.

Concluding Stone Scriptures

Stone is everlasting - as our Lord is, whereas wood weathers away quickly. By strict command of the Lord, altars of the temple and the temple itself were to be made of enduring **stone**, not wood (Exodus 20:25). **Stone** pillars were set up in them and throughout the Old Testament to memorialize God and *enduring* covenants made with Him. Special events associated with God in scripture were also memorialized by upright, strong **stones**. There was Jacob's single pillar set up at Peniel, the gate of heaven, where he wrestled with God and finally prevailed, ascending to heaven (Gen. 31:45, 32:30). The Prophet Samuel set up a memorial **stone** or pillar in Samuel 7:12. There were twelve **stone** pillars set up by Moses at the base of Sinai, and twelve more set up by Joshua and the children of Israel after they crossed over the Jordan River into the Promised Land (Josh. 4:3). Twelve unique **gemstones** were also placed in the ancient High Priest's Breastplate. **Gemstones** were also put into the special turban crowns (called diadems) of the High Priest and of Israel's Davidic kings. In the Book of Mormon, Ether approached the Lord with 16 **stones** for the barges he and his people would use to come to the New World (Ether 3:1). They provided needed light. When all things finally wrap up on this earth, those blessed with a new name by our Lord will be given a white **stone**, a *seer stone* - a source of light and revelation direct from God (Rev. 2:17; D&C 130:10).

Christ is “the **stone** which the builders rejected” (Psalm 118:22). He is the **rock** and *the sure foundation*. He is **the Stone of Israel**, a great *Seer*, Prophet, Priest, Teacher, and King. He is the Father of our salvation and the light and life of the world. Praise, honor, and glory be to Him!