



JEWISH SOURCES

THE TALMUD

The Jews handed down a large amount of oral tradition from generation to generation. This material was organized according to subject matter by Rabbi Akiba before his death in AD 135. His work was then revised by his student, Rabbi Meir. The project was completed about AD 200 by Rabbi Judah and is known as the Mishnah. Ancient commentary on the Mishnah was called the Gemaras. The combination of the Mishnah and the Gemaras form the Talmud. It would be expected that the most reliable information about Jesus from the Talmud would come from the earliest period of compilation - AD 70 to 200 known as **Tannaitic period**.

A very significant quotation found in the Sanhedrin 43a, dating from just this early period:

*“On the eve of the Passover Yeshu was hanged. 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. Anyone 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 the eve of the Passover”*

This quotation was taken from the reading in The Babylonian Talmud transl. by I. Epstein (London: Soncino, 1935), vol. III, Sanhednn 43a, p.281.

Here we have another brief account of the death of Jesus.

- The term “hanged” These two references to Jesus being "hanged" certainly provide an interesting term to describe his death. But it should be noted that the New Testament speaks of crucifixion in the same way. Jesus is said to have been "hanged" (Greek kremamenos in Gal. 3: 13), as were the two males killed at the same time (Greek kremasthenton in Luke 23:39).
- While the term "crucified" is a much more common reference to this event "hanged" is a variant expression of the same fate.

Lessons from this Passage:

- The fact of Jesus' death by crucifixion
- The time of this event, which is mentioned twice as occurring on the eve of the Jewish Passover.
- Surprisingly, that for forty days beforehand it was publicly announced that Jesus would be stoned.
 - While not specifically recorded in the New Testament, such is certainly consistent with both **Jewish practice** and with the **biblical report** that this had also been threatened at least two other occasions:
 - “Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am. 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 8:58-59)
 - “I and my Father are one. Then the Jews took up stones again to stone him. Jesus



answered them, Many good works have I shewed you from my Father; for which of those works do ye stone me? The Jews answered him, saying, For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, make yourself God.” (John 10:30-33)

- Jesus was judged by the Jews to be guilty "sorcery" and spiritual apostasy in leading Israel astray by his teaching.
- It is also stated that since no witnesses came forward to defend him, he was killed.
- Another passage in Sanhedrin 43a refers to the disciples
 - Another early reference in the Talmud speaks of five of Jesus' disciples and recounts their standing before judges who make individual decisions about each one, deciding that they should be executed. However, no actual deaths are recorded. (Sanhedrin 43a)
- From this second portion we can ascertain only (6) the fact that Jesus had some disciples
- Some among the Jews felt that these men were also guilty of actions which warranted execution