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## The Passion: The perfect play?

## Video transcript: From pulpit to play narrated by Bill Turnbull

Throughout the Middle Ages, Passion Plays were hugely popular and drew ever-increasing crowds.

The story-line surrounding Christ's death, as depicted in the Stations of the Cross, was perfect for the stage.

The drama opens with betrayal by a disciple in the Garden of Gethsemane. And action moves on to Jesus' trial by the Romans, the brutality of his death and the sense of abandonment.

It all made for the perfect play. Originally, these plays were written and produced by monks and priests to bring the story of Jesus to an audience that couldn't read or write.

But as the number of spectators grew, the dramas evolved, they were performed outside the church and new versions were created by playwrights to include everything the medieval audience wanted to see.

Practical jokes, slapstick comedy, even burlesque made it on to the stage alongside the biblical narrative.

There were scenes with Noah fighting with his wife and devils jumping out to scare the audience before falling over each other like buffoons.

By the 16th Century the Passion plays were accused of being bawdy, obscene and licentious.

It was all too much for conservatives and reformers alike and with Europe gripped by religious wars, Church leaders and monarchs, like our own Elizabeth I, outlawed what they called out-dated and morally dubious plays.

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