

Geneva Jury Finds Man Guilty in Baby's Death

GENEVA — A Geneva County jury last week found a Samson man guilty of capital murder in the death of his then-girlfriend's baby girl.

Stephen L. Preachers, 33, was sentenced to life in a state prison without the possibility of parole by Circuit Judge Ken Quattlebaum.

District Attorney Kirke Addams said he was happy for the family of Angel Marie Whitley, who was 21 months old when she was killed.

"They have waited a long time for the words 'guilty,'" Adams said. "The death of any child is terrible but the brutal murder of a child is reprehensible."

During the four days of testimony, witnesses testified Preachers became angry with the toddler during a visit to a relative's home on June 5, 2003.

Preachers had apparently grabbed the baby by the legs and lifted her toward a ceiling fan, then slammed her head on a dresser, police of-

ficers who investigated the death testified.

The girl's mother testified that Preachers had told her the girl's injuries were the result of a fall in the laundry room.

The child had been taken to three hospitals before she died in Birmingham five days later.

"This was a team effort and I can't thank Bill Filmore, Stephen Smith and Cathey Wood enough for their assistance in this case," Adams said. "I also thank law enforcement for their work (Geneva County Sheriff Greg Ward, Alabama Bureau of Investigation agents Tommy Merritt and J.R. Ward, and DHR workers Janet Chapman and Leslie Henderson). Their testimony made the case."

In a separate case, Franklin Eugene Herring of Samson was sentenced by Circuit Judge Charles Fleming to 11 years in prison.

Herring was found guilty

by a Geneva County Jury on June 15 of manslaughter for the shooting death of William Travis Thames on November 1, 2003. In addition, Herring was ordered to pay restitution and costs and ordered to attend the Department of Corrections Substance Abuse Program.

Giving emotional testimony on behalf of the state at the sentencing hearing was the sister of the victim, Debbie Wright, and one of the victim's sons, Dustin Thames. Chief Assistant District Attorney Bill Filmore stated that the state was seeking the maximum sentence for the class B felony of 20 years, but was satisfied with the judge's sentence and felt it was appropriate.

"Although 11 years doesn't replace the life of Travis Thames, the father of two young boys, at least the family got some satisfaction that Herring will spend time in prison for his crime," Filmore said.