

Who Killed Jesus?

INTRODUCTION

- A. Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* has sparked anew the debate about Jesus' true killers.
 - 1. The charge has been made that the movie is anti-Semitic in that it portrays the Jews as killing Jesus.
 - a. Rabbi Howard Abel Hirsch is quoted in the *Denver Post*: "Since the Romans were massacring Christians at the time when the gospels were written, there was a reluctance to antagonize them. Exonerate Pilate, a cruel political hack, portray him as a man of conscience, blame the Jews instead and inaugurate 19 centuries of Jewish persecution."
 - b. According to the *St. Louis Post—Dispatch*, the U. S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Anti-Defamation League obtained early versions of the script. Their concern was that Caiaphas (and, by extension, the Jewish people) convinced the helpless Pilate to crucify Jesus.
 - c. In 1543, Martin Luther wrote in *On the Jews and Their Lies*, "Set fire to their synagogues or schools and . . . bury and cover with dirt whatever will not burn . . . raze and destroy houses; take away their religious books; give them no safe-conduct on the highways."
 - 2. Many Christians, on the other hand, see the film as a fairly accurate depiction of the hours prior to Jesus' death.
- B. Where does the blame lie? Who is it that killed Jesus?

SOME PEOPLE DID KILL JESUS

- A. Judas was culpable in Jesus' death.
 - 1. Mt. 26:14-16; 47-50.
 - 2. Judas is the one who brought the Jewish hierarchy to Jesus so that they could arrest him.
 - a. Judas had a greed problem — "He was a thief, and as he had the money box he used to take what was put into it" (Jn. 12:6).
 - b. Because he could make a little money, he betrayed Jesus to the Jewish aristocracy.
 - c. Notice what John Chrysostom had to say: "Consider what befell him, how he simultaneously lost the money, committed the sin and destroyed his own soul. Such is the tyranny of covetousness. He did not even enjoy the money in his life, nor did he have any benefits in the life to come. He lost everything at once and, branded as a bad character even by his coconspirators, hanged himself."
- B. The Jewish aristocracy was culpable in Jesus' death.
 - 1. The Jews wanted Jesus dead.
 - a. "The Pharisees went out, and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him" (Mk. 3 :6).
 - b. Mt. 26:3-4.
 - 2. They were finally able to get Jesus.
 - a. The chief priests and the elders sent soldiers to arrest Jesus (Mt. 26:47).
 - b. The Jewish leaders decided that Jesus deserved death (Mt. 26:63-66).
 - c. "When morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death" (Mt. 27:1).
- C. Not only was the Jewish aristocracy responsible for Jesus' death, the Jewish people were responsible.
 - 1. The Gospels present Jerusalem's residents as playing a large role in Jesus' death.
 - a. When Pilate asked what he should do with Jesus, the people said, "Let him be crucified" (Mt. 27:23).
 - b. When Pilate was reluctant to crucify Jesus, "all the people answered, 'His blood be on us and on our children!'" (Mt. 27:25).

2. Later Christians understood the Jewish people to be culpable for Jesus' death.
 - a. In speaking to the multitude at Pentecost, Peter said, "This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men" (Acts 2:23).
 - b. Notice what Peter said when a crowd assembled after he had healed a crippled man (Acts 3:12-15).
 - c. Notice what Paul said in the synagogue at Antioch of Pisidia (Acts 13:27-28).
- D. The Romans played a huge role in Jesus' death.
 1. Pilate was a coward, who could have stood up and defended Jesus, but he did not.
 - a. Pilate took Jesus and scourged him (Jn. 19:1).
 - b. When Jesus was silent, Pilate asked him, "You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you, and power to crucify you?" (Jn. 19:10).
 - c. Pilate "released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, delivered him to be crucified" (Mt. 27:26).
 2. The Roman soldiers took Jesus and killed him.
 - a. The Roman soldiers mocked Jesus (Mt. 27:27-31).
 - b. The Roman soldiers killed Jesus — "When the soldiers had crucified Jesus they took his garments and made four parts" (Jn. 19:23).
 - c. The soldiers came up to Jesus and said, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" (Lk. 23:37).
- E. Did the Jews kill Jesus? The first century Jews did kill him, along with Judas and the Romans.

NO ONE KILLED JESUS

- A. The Scriptures tell us that God gave Jesus and that Jesus freely gave his life.
- B. God gave Jesus to die for the sins of the world.
 1. "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (Jn. 3:16).
 2. "This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men" (Acts 2:23).
 3. "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him?" (Rom. 8:32).
- C. Jesus freely gave himself.
 1. Jn. 10:17-18.
 2. Gal. 1:3-4.
 3. "Walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Eph. 5:2).
 4. Christ "gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds" (Tit. 2:14).
- D. Why did the Father give Jesus? Why did Jesus offer himself?
 1. Jesus took our place when he died at Golgotha.
 - a. "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed" (Is. 53:5).
 - b. Illustration about Ned Wright, *Sermons on the Cross*, p. 84.
 2. Jesus died in order to redeem us from sin.
 - a. "You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your fathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot" (1 Pet. 1:18-19).
 - b. Illustration about the father's asking his son how much he had cost him, *Stories for Preachers and Teachers*, sv. 1 Pet. 1:18-19.
- E. With all the debate raging about who really killed Jesus, we need to remember that Jesus died for you and for me.

1. Mel Gibson wanted to portray this by having his own hands nail Jesus to the cross in *The Passion*.
2. The Roman soldiers shook the dice
As for the stake they vied,
Quite unaware that on the cross
The world's Redeemer died.

The Roman soldiers shook the dice,
As for the stake they vied,
Are we as unconcerned as they
That Christ for us has died?