

## QUESTIONS WE WANT ANSWERED

### 16 Who Was Responsible for the Death of Christ?

*Scripture: Luke 23:33-34*

*"And when they came to the place called The Skull, there they crucified him and the criminals, one on the right and the other on the left. But Jesus was saying, "Father forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing."*

There is always a story to be told when a person dies. The time, place, and cause are the usual considerations. Occasionally the matter is complicated, particularly when someone is responsible. People who are the cause of someone dying are in a serious predicament even if the cause is just or accidental. I have talked with several who know themselves to be accountable for loss of life and they have told me that it is a sorrow they will carry with them for the rest of their lives, even though they know themselves to be forgiven by God and their fellow man. Our study of God's Word today has to do with the death of a certain person several hundred years ago, and our desire is to understand better the circumstances of his death and just who was responsible for what happened to him. This man was Jesus Christ and He died by crucifixion outside the gates of Jerusalem in the Spring of the year 33 A.D. Scholars have suggested various dates for the death of Christ. They range anywhere from A.D. 21 to A.D. 36. It appears that a stronger case can be mounted for the 33 A.D. date than for any of the others and we can allow that to stand even though the issue has been vigorously debated. The issue before us is rather the fact that Jesus did die a very hard death at the hands of cruel men and we seek to know where the burden of the blame can be laid. I will attempt to answer this question by drawing your attention to several passages of Scripture. Who was responsible for the death of Jesus?

**I. THE LEADERS OF THE JEWS WERE RESPONSIBLE:** *Mark 14:53-64;*  
*Luke 19:47-48*

I think that we should take the time to refer to the above references which will show very clearly that it was the Jewish officialdom which plotted to put Jesus to death. The Scribes and the Pharisees taunted Him with their accusations. We read in Mark 3:6, *"And the Pharisees went out and immediately began taking counsel with the Herodians against Him, as to how they might destroy Him."* The Apostle John records the avalanche of threats which fell upon Jesus from the

hands of the Council. Please note for your further study John 5:16, 18, 7:1, 25, 30, 32; 8:59; 10:31, 39. On at least two occasions the leaders of the Jews issued orders for Jesus' arrest. (John 11:57; 7:32) These first efforts failed. However, His bold attacks upon the Jewish leadership, His raising of Lazarus from the dead (John 11:45), and His public entry into Jerusalem, created such hostility on the part of the Council that it was compelled to react decisively. The doom of Jesus was sealed in the eyes of Jewish religious management.

As we proceed along these lines of thought someone is going to say, "It is evident from these verses that the Jews did want Jesus out of the way." The question is, why were they so hostile to him? Why did they want to have him killed when he claimed to be their promised messiah? I believe the answer to these questions is found in the prophecies about the coming messiah in the Old Testament.

Actually, two conflicting categories of prediction are present in law, prophets and psalms. There are passages which say that the messiah would come to sit and reign on the throne of David. Isaiah 9:7 is one of these. *"There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, On the throne of David and over His kingdom, to establish it and withhold it with justice and righteousness from then on and evermore."* A Jew reading that promise in the days of Jesus surely looked for a king. When Jesus said that only the meek would be part of His kingdom it was an immediate turn-off for people who were looking for might.

The Old Testament prophecies also stated the messiah would be led as a lamb to the slaughter. (Isaiah 53) The people could not see the trees for the forest. Most of the prophecies emphasized the kingly deliverer who was going to come. People living under the heel of Rome had their heads filled with thoughts of emancipation and the lowly Jesus didn't fit the picture at all. Hence, Jesus became the subject of increasing scorn which eventually became a capital punishment by death upon the cross

The question of the Jews being responsible for the death of Christ has been a heavy one through the centuries. I have spoken of the leaders and representatives and their role in these proceedings. There seems little justification in declaring the nation guilty as a whole. The Roman Catholic Church in the Second Vatican Council proceedings absolved the Jews of their guilt in the death of Jesus with the words, "What happened to Christ in His passion cannot be attributed to all Jews, without distinction, then alive, nor to the Jews of today."

Christ was rejected not because He did not sufficiently prove Himself to be the promised messiah, but because the leaders of religious thought and the teachers of the people had lost their awareness of what the prophets had written. They transferred their affections to themselves, to their love of form and high places, and they further sought for a magnificent temporal ruler in the place of a spiritual Savior. The majority of the people were dependent upon the Scribes and the Pharisees for their understanding and direction with the result that they obeyed and accepted any instruction given about Christ. The chief priests had personal motives for wanting Jesus out of the way because He denounced their vices and hypocrisy. The pride of the Pharisee was not about to applaud the humility preached by Jesus. It seems to serve no purpose to dwell upon the Jewish involvement in the crucifixion of Christ. It is a sad excuse for the waves of persecution which the Jews have felt for centuries. It is interesting to note that the early Christians who formed the primitive church did not emphasize Jewish involvement in Christ's death. Many of these people were themselves Jews who came to trust Jesus Christ. When they thought of the way Jesus suffered they made mention of a particular man in one of their creeds. They used to say "*...suffered under Pontius Pilate.*" To conclude this point, Jewish leaders did seek to destroy Jesus. (Luke 19:47) They did arrange for the betrayal and arrest of Jesus. (Luke 22:2-6) They were responsible for the mock trial which rendered the guilty verdict. (Mark 14: 53-64) They did coerce Pilate into sentencing Jesus. (Matt.27:25) However the Jews were powerless to kill Jesus. The Roman Empire held that power.

There is an interesting verse in I Peter 1:10 which describes the quest of the prophets in their attempt to determine the meaning of their writings. What they wrote left no doubt concerning the suffering servant of the Lord. The sacrifices of the law, the precepts surrounding the blood, the Passover and Day of Atonement, the sufferings described in Psalm 22 and 69, Isaiah 52:12 to 53:11; Daniel 9:26; Zechariah 13:6-7, all foretold the manner in which the Messiah would come. Yet, when Jesus came, no one seemed to understand what those Old Testament words meant. Even the prophets themselves searched for the meaning of the revelation given to them. (I-Peter 1:10-12)

## **II. PILATE WAS RESPONSIBLE:**

As the events of the crucifixion unfold the leaders of the Jews, not having the authority to enforce a death penalty themselves, arrange for the arrest of Jesus. He is taken prisoner in the Garden of Gethsemane and brought to Annas, the high

priest. Annas was no longer in office at the time, yet before him Jesus is interrogated. (John 18:19) Annas emerges in the record as a shrewd and successful politician. He was at this time about 70 years of age. It was to be expected that Jesus and Annas would clash. Jesus was a clear threat to him. So Jesus was brought, "to Annas first." (John 18:13) Some feel it was Annas who bribed Judas and pressured Pilate. Put out of office by Rome, Annas built up a political machine and held much power as High Priest. Jesus strongly rebukes him and is sent to Caiaphas. (John 18:24) It was Caiaphas who convened the council. This council was the important and decisive group responsible for the conviction of Jesus on the charge of blasphemy (John 18:28; Mark 14:53) However, even the council could not carry out a death penalty, a higher authority was needed. The Roman governor, Pilate, could only decide upon that kind of punishment. Pilate did his best to avoid making a decision about Jesus. He finally has to yield, he feels, to mounting pressures from Jesus' accusers. The charge that Jesus is politically dangerous was the crowning issue. (Matt. 15:2; Luke 23:1; John 18:33) The actions of Pilate open the way for validation of the death sentence which had been set upon Jesus by the Jewish authorities. Pilate was the man who finally sent Jesus to die by the Roman method of crucifixion. While the Jews demanded it, the Gentiles there carried it out.

### **III. THE ROMAN SOLDIERS WERE RESPONSIBLE:**

In Matthew 27:26 we read, "*Pilate delivered him to be crucified.*" Execution was to be effected by the representatives of the mighty Roman Empire, the Roman soldiers. There is the tendency to think only of the spiritual significance of the crucifixion and to overlook the physical suffering Jesus endured. First, there was the scourging, the beating with a flagellum, a whip with bits of bone entwined. In the case of Jesus there was the scarlet robe and crown of thorns befitting a king. These were illegal insults which the Romans may have taken upon themselves to show their intense hatred for the Jews. There was the compulsion to bear the cross. Jesus fell under the great weight as he plodded along the Via Dolorosa. The place of crucifixion was a conspicuous one. The victim was stripped for public viewing. The nails were driven into the hands and feet, centers of the nervous system, which brought unbearable pain. The body was placed in an unnatural posture to aggravate the pain should the person move. The wounds caused terrible thirst and fever. Circulation was restricted and the strongest man would be dead in less than 48 hours. Jesus of Nazareth, a person of thirty three years of age, thus died at the hands of Roman soldiers by crucifixion.

#### **IV. SATAN WAS RESPONSIBLE:**

The same enemy who taunted Christ now successfully deceives a man who was numbered among the twelve disciples. We read in Luke 22:3, *"Then Satan entered into Judas surnamed. Iscariot, being of the number of the twelve."* We do not believe that Judas was compelled to do the will of Satan. Rather, he voluntarily obeyed the suggestions of Satan and freely consented to respond to him. At any rate, Satan was active in the events of the last week of Jesus' life. Jesus answered the chief priests and captains of the temple with the words, *"when I was daily with you in the temple, ye stretched forth no hands against me: but this is your hour, and the power of darkness."* (Luke 22-53) In Colossians 2:14 we read, *"Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it."* The evil powers of the unseen world lurked about the cross of Jesus.

#### **V. GOD THE FATHER WAS RESPONSIBLE:**

It is impossible to understand exactly what happened when Jesus died unless God the Father is brought into the explanation. Strange and incredible as it may seem, it was God the Father who put His son to death. The death of Christ was a planned death. In Isaiah 53:10 we read, *"It pleased Jehovah to bruise Him; He hath put Him to grief."* In the well known verses in Acts 2:22-23 we read of Him *"...being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God,"* In Matthew Jesus is seen in the Garden of Gethsemane with these words upon His lips, *"O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt."* (26:39) I believe these words are a good indication that only God the Father and Christ knew what was about to occur at Calvary. The only exception may have been Mary of Bethany who broke an alabaster box at the feet of Jesus against the day of His burying, (John 12:1-7) and the penitent thief who caught a glimpse of the afterlife on the cross and asked for remembrance.

One of the most amazing verses in the New Testament has to be Luke 18:34. *"And they understood none of these things: and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken."* The reason why the disciples did not understand Calvary was because the truth was kept from them. A veil was placed upon their minds so that they could not understand. For that matter, the meaning of Calvary was evidently hidden from those who hung Christ upon the cross. When Christ prayed, *"forgive them for they know not what they do."* He

meant those words literally. The Pharisees urged Christ to come down from the cross because they had no idea that He could not possibly come down from that cross. It was the resurrected Christ who brought understanding to believers as He opened the Scriptures and spoke of Himself out of the law and the Psalms. The Holy Spirit who came at Pentecost led then further into the truth. Therefore Calvary is understood in the framework of Christian doctrine. There was a reason for Jesus and His Calvary cross. *"God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself."* (II Cor.5:19) Christ died because it was in the plan of His Father that He should die. From eternity past God had decreed that Jesus would be a suffering substitute in the satisfaction of the law's demands. This plan was hidden from man in order that it might be fulfilled. Peter said that if the identity of Jesus had been known they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. The decision on the part of Pilate, the Roman Soldiers, the Jews, was their own, but it embraced the plan and purpose of God the Father.

#### **VI. JESUS WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR HIS OWN DEATH:**

Still the picture is not complete. Having spoken of the Father's plan we recognize that Jesus also knew the source of the powers which would be raised against Him. Listen to His words to Pilate, *"Thou couldst have no power against me, except it were given thee from above."* (John 19:11) When it comes right down to it much of the responsibility falls upon Jesus Himself. He deliberately accepted that cup. When Peter would have defended his Lord with the sword Jesus said to him, *"Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?"* Matthew 26:53-54 It was the same Jesus who submitted to those mock trials and stripes who said, *"No man taketh my life from me, But I lay it down of myself. I have the power to lay it down, and I have the power to take it again."* (John 10:18) Why did Christ choose to die? The answer is because of sin. It is in the nature of sin to destroy. The wages of sin is death. (Romans 6:23) Sin sent animals to their death so that their blood could be spilt as an atonement for the souls of men. The Levitical law said categorically that the life of the flesh was in the blood. Thus, when Christ died upon the cross, He did so as the lamb without blemish and spot to shed His blood and make atonement for mankind. (Isa.55:10) I have heard that Jesus is the only founder of a world religion to choose to die for those who sought forgiveness for their sins. What should we do with a God who comes and dies for us? We all can say that Christ chose to die for me. Hebrews 2:9 reads, *"But we see Jesus, who was*

*crowned with glory and honour: that He by the grace of God should taste of death for every man.*" This was what Jesus chose to do. In a very real way He was responsible for His death.

#### **VII. EACH ONE OF US IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DEATH OF JESUS:**

It is all well and good for us to speak of the Jewish leaders, of Annas, Caiaphas, Pilate, of the Roman soldiers, God the Father and Jesus Himself. It all makes very interesting reading, and lends itself to a better understanding of what Jesus went through. But the most important part of the story has yet to be told. In fact, there would be no story if it were not for us, for you and for me. The Bible puts it all into one sentence, *"But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."* (Romans 5:8) A familiar verse is Galatians 2:20, but an important part of it is often overlooked. *"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live...I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loves me and gave Himself for me."* It was sin that hoisted Christ aloft on a Roman gallows hundreds of years ago. It was sin past, present, and future. It was my sin and your sin, though we were generations unborn, that caused Him to die. He was anxious to do that for us. Christ is the Savior of all men but especially of those who believe. (I Tim. 4:10) God predestined that the death of Christ would bring cleansing and forgiveness to those who believe. (John 3:16) The invitation is universal and whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. Let me say to you in closing that Jesus died for you and because of you. Have you realized that? Have you believed that? Have you responded by thanking Him for what He has done and by receiving Him into your heart as your own personal Savior? May God grant that you will do that.

Let us pray together. Dear Heavenly Father, take these truths from your Word today and give us the discernment to understand their significance for our lives. Continue your work of grace and draw us to yourself according to our need. We ask in the strong name of Jesus, Amen.

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March 21, 1976

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