

Did the Jews Crucify Jesus?

Intro: One of the most heated discussions to come out of the passion of Christ is the question, “Did the Jews Kill Jesus?” There has been heated discussion about this question and a great deal of misinformation has been put out in the media on the subject. Let take a few moments today to address this question.

The Jew’s role in the crucifixion of Jesus according to the Scriptures.

The Jewish leadership had an integral part in the crucifixion according to the Gospels.

Therefore the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council, and were saying, “What are we doing? For this man is performing many signs. “If we let Him go on like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.” But a certain one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, “You know nothing at all, nor do you take into account that it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish.” Now this he did not say on his own initiative; but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but that He might also gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. So from that day on they planned together to kill Him. (John 11:47-53)

And those who had seized Jesus led Him away to Caiaphas, the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were gathered together. (Matthew 26:57)

Now when morning had come, all the chief priests and the elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put Him to death; and they bound Him, and led Him away, and delivered Him up to Pilate the governor. (Matthew 27:1-2)

Nothing could be more clearly revealed in Scripture than that the leadership of the Jewish people initiated the death of Jesus.

Moreover, some of the Jewish population was persuaded to join with them in this calling for His death. The Scriptures never charge the whole Jewish nation, every individual with the crucifixion. The text makes clear that there were many Jews who were loyal followers of Christ.

The Jews were charged by the apostles with the sin of crucifying the Savior.

The charge of crucifying the son of God is clearly made against them by the apostles of Jesus.

“Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know— this Man, delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a

cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. (Acts 2:22-23)

“The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His servant Jesus, the one whom you delivered up, and disowned in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release Him. 14 “But you disowned the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, but put to death the Prince of life, the one whom God raised from the dead, a fact to which we are witnesses. (Acts 3:13-15)

The reaction of the Jews indicates an acknowledgement of the truthfulness of the apostle’s charge.

Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37)

The multitudes of Pentecost acknowledged their guilt and responded in obedience to Peter’s message (Ac. 2:41).

And when they had threatened them further, they let them go (finding no basis on which they might punish them) on account of the people, because they were all glorifying God for what had happened; (Acts 4:21)

The Jewish leaders did not deny that they had crucified Jesus; they could have punished them for false testimony. Instead they simply threatened them and let them go!

In spite of the Biblical evidence, some so-called scholars today are affirming that the Jews had very little, if anything, to do with the death of Jesus.

At that time, the nascent Christian sect was trying to distinguish itself from its Jewish roots for two reasons. First, the Christians wanted to attract gentile converts. Second, because the Jews were rebelling against the Romans, a repudiation of Christian kinship with the Jews could be politically advantageous. It is for these reasons, the scholars argue, that the Gospels 1) assign primary blame to the Jews, not the Romans; and 2) sympathetically portray Pilate, who is described in other ancient texts as a cruel despot. Additionally, many scholars have stressed Jesus' identity as a political subversive, which would explain why the Romans chose a means of execution, crucifixion, usually reserved for insurrectionists. (Did The Jews Kill Jesus? By Benjamin Soskis)

Then why do the Gospels convey a different, more disturbing picture?

These books were written at a time when the Christian religion was making its first tentative efforts to attract followers among the peoples of the Roman Empire. Initial attempts to convince the Jews themselves that their long-awaited redeemer had come were not going well. As already noted many Jews had never heard of Jesus at all, and it appears that many others were unconvinced that this man, ignominiously put to death by an oppressive empire, could be the one they sought. If he were, why were idolaters still

ruling the Holy Land? Why were wolves still eating lambs? If Jesus' own people were not interested in the new gospel, perhaps the time had come to carry the message to others. However, you could not very easily offer the Gospel to the people of Rome and at the same time blame them for the scandalous death which that Gospel proclaimed: people are not attracted by a story in which they are the chief villains. The result was a natural tendency to tell the story in such a way that blame fell mostly on those who had already demonstrated their resistance to the Christian message, namely the Jews themselves. We need not think of fabrication here, or of malice (though both may have been involved), simply the sincere efforts of religious missionaries to tell their story in such a way that the intended audience would be most attracted to it; we all tell stories all the time, and we all shape our stories for similar reasons. (Robert Goldenberg, Professor of History and Judaic Studies at the State University of New York in Stony Brook) These writers affirm that the Christians blamed the Jews for the crucifixion because they had rejected the gospel and because it would be easier to convert the Romans if their part in the crucifixion was downplayed.

A number of sources outside the Scriptures corroborate the NT record.

The Jewish leadership had an integral part in the crucifixion according to Jewish historian Josephus.

*Now there was about this time, Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles. He was the Christ, and when Pilate, **at the suggestion of the principle men among us**, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him; for he appeared to them alive again the third day; as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him. And the tribe of Christians so named from him are not extinct at this day” (Antiquities, XVIII, 33).*

Some scholars now deny that this text in total is authentic. There is now reason however to reject the statement of Josephus.

The Jewish leadership had an integral part in the crucifixion according to Mara Bar-Serapion.

*Some time after the destruction of Jerusalem, Mara, a Syrian and probably Stoic philosopher, wrote a letter from prison to his son, encouraging him to pursue wisdom. In his letter he compares Jesus to the philosophers Socrates and Pythagoras, writing, “What advantage did the Athenians gain from putting Socrates to death? Famine and plague came upon them as a judgment for their crime. What advantage did the men of Samos gain from burning Pythagoras? In a moment they land was covered with sand. What advantage did the Jews **gain from executing their wise King**? It was just after that that their kingdom was abolished”*

The Jewish leadership had an integral part in the crucifixion according to the Jews own literature, according to the Talmud.

The Talmud is a collection of Jewish writings that preserve the “learning” of the Rabbis in the form of law and commentary. There are a number of references to Jesus in the Talmud and it is acknowledged that Jesus was crucified (hanged) as a false prophet. “It has been taught: On the eve of Passover they hanged Yeshu. And an announcer went out, in front of him, for forty days (saying): ‘He is going to be stoned, because he practiced sorcery and enticed and led Israel astray. Anyone who knows anything in his favor, let him come and plead in his behalf.’ But, not having found anything in his favor, they hanged him on the eve of Passover (Sanhedrin 43a; cf. t. Snh. 10:11; y. Sanh. 7:12; Tg. Esther 7:9)

Why the point needs to be discussed?

The integrity of the OT Scriptures is at stake!

The Jewish rejection confirms the truthfulness of the OT prophets.

a) Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, And like a root out of parched ground; He has no stately form or majesty That we should look upon Him, Nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him. He was despised and forsaken of men, A man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; And like one from whom men hide their face, He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, mitten of God, and afflicted. (Isaiah 53:1-4)

If indeed the Jews did not have a part in the crucifixion then the very Jewish Scriptures are proven to be false! The Jews did indeed fulfill the words of the prophet.

b) But though He had performed so many signs before them, yet they were not believing in Him; that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spoke, “Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?” (John 12:37-38)

The integrity of the NT Scriptures is at stake!

Conclusion: Though it is understandable that some may consider the gospel a source of Jewish persecution, it is not. The fact however must not be altered to avoid an unpleasant misuse of truth. We should pray that all Jews today see the mistake made by their ancestors in their rejection of Jesus and repent and turn to Christ so that they might be saved.