



Who Killed Jesus?

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The new movie "The Passion of The Christ" by Mel Gibson has recently resurfaced the ongoing debate of who should be held responsible for the murder of Jesus Christ. Understandably, some Jews who have suffered through a series of horrors throughout human history are particularly concerned about being blamed for Jesus' murder as it may likely direct further hatred toward them. Fortunately, the Christian Scriptures do speak to this issue with a rich variety of theological, historical, personal, and practical layers of explanation - one that indicts everyone, including myself, as morally responsible for Jesus' death. In so doing, the Bible seeks to detract us from focusing on the sins of others, confronts us with our own sins and what Jesus has done to lovingly accomplish our forgiveness.

Layer 1 – Theologically, everyone killed Jesus

I John 2:2 "He [Jesus] is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world." Jesus' dearest friend was a young man named John who was the longest living and most prominent pastor in the earliest days of Christianity. John was present when Jesus died on the cross, and later was one of the first people to be with Jesus following His resurrection. Theologically, John explained that Jesus died for the sins of the people in his day, as well as the sins of people from all nations in all ages of human history. Therefore, in a general sense everyone is morally culpable for Jesus' death.

Layer 2 – Historically, Romans, Greeks, and Jews killed Jesus

Acts 4:27 "Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate [Romans] met together with the Gentiles [Greeks] and the people of Israel [Jews] in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed." One of the early converts to Christianity was a well educated doctor named Luke. Luke carefully wrote the historical details of Jesus' life and the early church in the continuum of the Bible books he penned called Luke and Acts. In his historical account of Jesus' death obtained from the testimony of eyewitnesses, Luke explains how the three primary cultural groups of the Romans, Greeks, and Jews (which comprised the majority of that multicultural society) all participated in varying ways in the murder of Jesus. Consequently, no one group of people can be held responsible for Jesus' murder though essentially, all people groups present in His day are responsible.

Layer 3 – Practically, Jesus laid down His own life

John 10:17-18 "The reason my Father loves me is that I [Jesus] lay down my life-only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again..." Before He was crucified, Jesus promised both His death and resurrection. He clearly taught that though it would appear certain people would be responsible for His death, ultimately He could not have died unless it was what He desired and permitted to occur. Though various people cried for His execution, falsely accused Him, and in the end nailed Him to a cross, for all practical purposes - it was only made possible by Jesus permitting them to do so. Therefore, Jesus is culpable for His own death.

Layer 4 – Personally, I killed Jesus

Romans 4:25 "He [Jesus] was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification." In the above verse, as well as throughout the Bible, it is repeatedly taught that death itself is caused by sin (e.g. Genesis 2:16-17; Romans 5:12, 6:23; James 1:15). Jesus claimed to have never sinned (John 8:46), something that no other person in the history of the world has been able to claim. Jesus' sinless life corresponds both with the promises written before His birth (Isaiah 53:9), and the eyewitness testimony of those who knew Him best (I Peter 2:21-22). Therefore, Jesus died not for His sins, but rather for "our sins". "Our sins" include my sins - which makes me blameworthy for His death. In a very real sense, Jesus died for my sins which means I personally killed Jesus.

Layer 5 – Ultimately, God the Father killed Jesus

Isaiah 53:10 "Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him [Jesus] and cause him to suffer..." In conclusion, while the whole world, various people groups in Jesus' day, Jesus Himself, and every Christian throughout history are in different ways responsible for Jesus' death; the fact remains that ultimately, it was God the Father who killed God the Son, according to His plan of salvation. We should not point the finger of responsibility at the Jews or any other people group for the death of Jesus. Instead, we should repent of our sins, accept forgiveness through Jesus' death, and raise our hands in worshipful surrender - with one hand pointing to God the Father who devised our plan of salvation, and the other hand pointing to God the Son who accomplished our salvation through His own passion, or suffering, in our place.