

# What About the Accusation that the Jewish People Killed Jesus?

Throughout the centuries one of the greatest reasons given to justify the persecution of the Jewish people has been the charge that they were responsible for the death of Jesus. There is more to this than simply blaming the Jewish people for the death of Jesus. Lopsided views can lead to gross error, and, in the case of the Jewish people, anti-Semitism. According to the scriptures, those responsible for the death of Jesus are:

- ♦ Herod (Acts 4:27)
- ♦ Pontius Pilate (Acts 4:27)
- ♦ Gentiles (Acts 4:27)
- ♦ The people of Israel (Acts 2:3-6; 4:10, 4:27)
- ♦ God the Father (Isaiah 53:6; Acts 2:23)
- ♦ Satan (John 13:2; Genesis 3:15)
- ♦ Humanity's sin (Is. 53:6; 1 John 2:2)

### Gentile responsibility

While the Jewish people called for the crucifixion, and thus bear responsibility, we must remember that without participation from the Gentile nation of Rome, the actual crucifixion could not have happened. (John 18:31-32) Pilate knew that Jesus was an innocent man yet he succumbed to the pressure of the Jewish leadership. He certainly had the power and authority to prevent the crucifixion. In addition to Pilate's culpability, the Roman soldiers were especially cruel in their treatment of the Lord. (Matthew 27:27-36)

### Jewish responsibility

The Jewish leadership did insist upon the death penalty. They clearly are responsible for their actions. (Luke 23:24; Matt. 26:59-60; John 19:1-22) However, this does not mean that all Jews in Jesus' day were responsible for His death. Nor does it mean that all of the Jewish leaders were responsible. Joseph of Arimethea and Nicodemus were two notable exceptions.

There is likewise no support for making all Jews forever responsible. Many have quoted Matt. 27:35 in which the Jewish leaders cry out "His blood be on us and on our children." This verse has been used to substantiate the claim that the Jews have been punished throughout history for the death of Jesus. To say that God would hold all Jewish people responsible for this statement is a failure to understand the character and grace of God. Did God honor Pilate's words in Matt. 27:24 regarding his statement of innocence of the blood of Jesus? Would God listen to the cry of an angry Jewish mob and not to the prayer of His Son on the cross when He prayed, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do"?

The biblical meaning of the death of Jesus is found in the images portrayed in the sacrificial system which foreshadowed Christ's sacrifice on the cross. In order for an individual to have atonement and forgiveness he had to first lay his hands on the offering, symbolically placing his sin on the sacrificial animal. Then after receiving instruction from the priest, the person seeking to be reconciled to God had to kill the animal. The blood from the animal was then offered by the priest on the altar. God would acknowledge the blood and forgive the sinner.

This helps us to understand the truth of who is responsible for the death of Jesus. Just as the sinner who wanted to be reconciled to God had to kill the lamb, so too we must acknowledge that it was our sin that put Jesus on the cross. In order for us to find atonement we, as individuals, must lay hands upon God's Lamb through faith and confess that it was our sin that killed Jesus. In truth we must apply His blood to our lives or we cannot find atonement. Only a true understanding of the death of Jesus coupled with personal responsibility and confession will bring about redemption and reconciliation.

**-Roy Schwarcz**

