

Who Killed Jesus?

By Pastor Kelly Sensenig

Who killed Jesus? Because of a present-day Hollywood film many are asking this question and seem to be confused as to who really killed Jesus. There is much talk and speculation about this subject today. I was watching an interview with so-called scholars and experts on the biblical records. They were being asked this same question, “Who really killed Jesus?” The problem with these interviews was that those being questioned were steeped in liberalism and denied many of the historical records in the gospels. They were outright left-winged liberals so their opinions were biased and skewed with rationalistic unbelief.

In this study I want to answer the question that has raised so much controversy in our time – “Who killed Jesus?” The old spiritual that used to be sung went like this: “Who Killed Jesus I would like to know?” Well, we are going to answer this question straight from the Bible. There is a four-fold answer to the question, “Who killed Jesus?”

1. God killed Jesus (sovereignly)

Yes, God killed Jesus. God was responsible for the death of Jesus Christ. Every other answer to this question actually stems from this most basic and biblical conclusion. This means that the death of Jesus was in the sovereign plan of God from eternity past and ultimately it was God who killed His only Son Jesus. Let's state it clearly. God killed Jesus! There is a remarkable verse that many times is forgotten when we reflect upon the death of Jesus Christ. Revelation 13:8 says that Jesus was “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.” The word order favors the word “Lamb” as the antecedent to the expression “slain from the foundation of the world.” This is a very interesting verse that leads us to the conclusion that it was in God's plan to slay Jesus even before the world was ever created. It tells me that ultimately it was God's plan to cause His Son to die for mankind even before the earth was ever framed. Christ's death was foreordained by God and was an event that had to occur because of the sovereign plan of God. Make no mistake about it.

God's redemptive plan has been established before the foundation of the world.

God knew everything that would take place in the future even before it occurred. He knew man would sin and in His sovereignty allowed mankind to sin. God did not create sin but allowed sin to become part of His sovereign program so that His grace could be manifested before a world that had sinned. But with man sinning a Savior would be needed so the human race could be restored to the place of acceptance before God's matchless holiness. Therefore, God predestined His Son to be slain on the cross so that mankind could be rescued from judgment for his sins and be restored to God.

So who killed Jesus? God killed Jesus! Another reference of Scripture would indicate this to be true. Acts 2:23 says, "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." Peter in his sermon on the Day of Pentecost said that Jesus was delivered into the hands of the Jewish people by the "determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God." This means that it was God's decreed or set purpose and plan to deliver His Son over to the Jewish people so that He might suffer death and die for the sins of the world. The decrees of God refer to His eternal purpose. God does not make His decrees to alter them as human history develops but decrees them in eternity past and then brings them to pass according to His divine will. It was according to God's decreed purpose and foreknown plan that Jesus would die upon the cross. Because of God's ultimate purpose and foreknown plan He determined that His only Son would be crucified on the cross.

The writing of Moses and the prophets all show that Christ would, according to God's plan, suffer and die. Jesus said in Luke 24:25-26, "... O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken. And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: Acts 17:3 says it this way, "Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ." Acts 26:23 also states "That Christ should suffer, *and* that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles."

So the first answer to the question (“Who killed Jesus?”) would be that God in His own sovereign purpose and plan, which was decreed before the foundation of the world, killed Jesus. In fact, within the Trinitarian oneness of the Godhead it was God the Father who killed God the Son (Jesus). This is beautifully expressed in the beloved Bible verse of John 3:16 where Jesus Himself says, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” Yes, God killed Jesus (“we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God” – Isaiah 53:4).

The certainty of Christ's death within the plan of God was depicted in a painting by Holman Hunt titled "The Shadow of Death." It shows the inside of a carpenter's shop in Nazareth at the end of the workday. Jesus is standing by His workbench. He has just laid down His saw and is lifting His eyes to heaven. His face is distorted, as if with pain. He is stretching, raising His arms to release the tension in His muscles. The setting sun, coming in through the open door, casts His shadow on the wall behind Him in the form of a cross. The tool rack runs parallel to the shadow of His outstretched arms. He looks as if He has been crucified. This painting expresses the central truth that Jesus Christ came to earth to take away "the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

1. God killed Jesus (sovereignly)
2. The Romans killed Jesus (unlawfully)

The Romans crucified Jesus unlawfully because there was no legal charge held against Him that He should be crucified as a thief. However, it was the Roman government of the day that was responsible for carrying out the actual death of Jesus and nailing Jesus to a cross like a criminal. The biblical record makes this very clear. The Romans were the *instruments* that God used to carry out His predetermined plan to have His Son crucified.

John 18:38 records this: “Pilate saith unto him, What is truth? And when he had said this, he went out again unto the Jews, and saith unto them, I find in him no fault *at all*.” Jesus said His kingdom was not of this world (vs. 36). Therefore, Pilate knew that Jesus was not a political revolutionary and could find not find fault with Jesus for

breaking any law. John 19:1-4 says, "Then Pilate therefore took Jesus, and scourged *him*. And the soldiers (Roman soldiers) platted a crown of thorns, and put *it* on his head, and they put on him a purple robe, And said, Hail, King of the Jews! and they smote him with their hands. Pilate therefore went forth again, and saith unto them, Behold, I bring him forth to you, that ye may know that I find no fault in him." Here we find that Pilate was reconfirming to the people that he had found no fault in Jesus and that the crucifixion was really unlawful. John 19:6 reiterates this: "When the chief priests therefore and officers saw him, they cried out, saying, Crucify *him*, crucify *him*. Pilate saith unto them, Take ye him, and crucify *him*: for I find no fault in him." Pilate clearly recognized that Jesus had done nothing to warrant execution. He was an innocent man who had committed no crime contrary to Roman standards or laws. This is further illustrated by another action of Pilate. In Matthew 27:24, "When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but *that* rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed *his* hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye *to it*."

One liberal historical scholar of the biblical records claim that this is something that would never happen and did not happen historically. His claim was that such a ruthless man as Pilate would never stoop to such humility before the people. The liberal said that Pilate would have had no concern about Jesus or what happened to Him. Let me say what the real problem is with liberals. They simply don't believe what the Bible says! Who are they to say that Pilate did not go through this ceremony before the people? Who are they to say that this incident should not be in the Bible? Let me just say that their historical guesswork that dismisses this incident is nothing more than intellectual defiance against the Bible. I'd rather take God's Word as face value instead of believing the intellectual defiance of so-called scholars of the Bible. Pilate did not want Jesus to be killed and we will see why in a moment.

Turning back to John 19 we read of the suffering of the Savior. In verse one Jesus was scourged. Scourging was a standard and preliminary to a Roman execution. Jewish law limited scourging to thirty-nine strokes so the victim would not die before the execution. Josephus tells of a man whose bones were laid bare by scourging.

Eusebius reports of how veins, arteries, entrails, and organs were exposed to sign by the scourge.

In verses two and three we find the Roman soldiers mocking Jesus as they greeted Him with the words, "Hail King of the Jews." In doing so they twisted some thorns into a makeshift crown and placed it on his head and also put a robe of purple (usually worn by military officers) and placed it on him. They did all of this in order to mock Jesus. Then the soldiers became physically abusive. They struck Jesus in the face marring his appearance. Isaiah 52:14 prophetically said this about the passion of the Christ, "As many were astonished at thee; his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men." It must have brought deep sadness to the heart of God the Father to see His Son suffer such terrible abuse at the hands of wicked men. What marvelous patience the King of creation demonstrated! The Sovereign King was suffering at the hands of the creatures that He had created! There is no greater love! What a symbol of grace!

In John 19:5 we find Jesus coming out of the Praetorium wearing the crown of thorns and purple robe, Pilate introduced Him to the crowds by saying, "Behold the man!" It is difficult to know whether he said this in mockery, in sympathy, or without any particular emotion. Most likely Pilate was probably attempting to demonstrate to the Jews the absurdity of executing such a weak and unimposing man. But these words of Pilate mean much to those of us who are Christ's followers today. We must "Behold the man!" We must see Him in His agony and in some way enter into His suffering and shame. If we will but behold the Lord Jesus Christ and His suffering on our behalf we will be moved with compassion to live for Him and serve Him the rest of our lives! Behold the man!!

In John 19:5-6 Pilate realized the severity of this crime against a person who claimed to be a god. Pilate understood that Jesus claimed to be some kind of divine god and this caused Pilate to fear even more knowing that he might execute a god. Although Pilate was not a religious man he was a superstitious man like most Romans. The Romans believed in many gods and knew stories of gods who had appeared in human form (Acts 14:12). Pilate was already afraid

he was losing control of the situation and now even more afraid that he might be murdering some god who had appeared in human form.

The words of Jesus in John 19:11 are very significant. It tells us that God ultimately gives power and authority to rulers on earth as He sees fit. Daniel 4:17 says, “the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men.” In verses twelve and thirteen we again we see that Pilate wanted to release Jesus but the people would have nothing to do with this. They tried to put Pilate between a rock and a hard place by saying that Jesus claimed to be King and spoke against the royal position of Caesar. In any event, we see that the Romans were responsible for the death of Jesus from the perspective of being the government that actually sentenced and killed Jesus. John 19:16, “Then delivered he him therefore unto them to be crucified. And they took Jesus, and led *him* away.” He was “a lamb without blemish and without spot.” So the Romans had a part in the death of Jesus Christ in that Pilate, acting on behalf of Rome, sentenced Jesus to death unlawfully. He was tried and condemned like a criminal without being a criminal.

1. God killed Jesus (sovereignly)
2. The Romans killed Jesus (unlawfully)
3. The Jews killed Jesus (ignorantly)

Today everybody is afraid that whenever something is adversely spoken against the Jewish people that this means a person becomes anti-Semitic or that he is trying to persecute the Jewish people in some way. Listen, we have to stop trying to please everybody today for fear of being misunderstood. Trying to please everybody is the political game – not God’s game. Let me say today that the Jewish people were responsible for the death of Jesus. The Scriptures are very clear on this. There can be no question that the Jewish people wanted Jesus dead because of His claims. This does not make a person a Jewish hater but a Jewish historian. The Jews killed Jesus. Let the Bible speak for itself.

Paul in Romans 11:20 states the Jewish unbelief of the Messiah and their ignorance of His personal claims. “Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith...” Romans 11:30

also confirms the Jewish ignorance when saying, “For as ye in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their unbelief.” Ignorance and unbelief are the hallmark of Israel in the past and even in the present.

Isaiah’s prophecy points to a future day when the nation of Israel will look back on what they did to the Messiah and realize that they crucified the true Messiah out of blindness and ignorance. Isaiah 53:4-8 records what a believing Jewish remnant will say in the coming day when Jesus returns to earth. They will mourn and possess heavy sorrow as they say: “Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, *he* was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken.” The repentant nation in this great coming day will realize that they in their blindness and willful ignorance rejected the Messiah. In essence, they will confess that in their spiritual ignorance they wanted the Messiah dead and that in return He actually died in their place. What an amazing revelation this will be to the Jews in the future! Through their own ignorance came their own salvation!

In Matthew 13:15 Jesus describes the general state of the Jewish people in His day when saying, “For this people’s heart is waxed gross, and *their* ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with *their* eyes, and hear with *their* ears, and should understand with *their* heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.” Yes, the Jews killed Jesus out of willful ignorance and personal rejection of His messianic claims. In Luke 19:41-44 Jesus wept over the people in the city of Jerusalem and said: “... If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things *which belong* unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies

shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, And shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation.” In essence, Jesus was saying that the Jews ignorantly missed the time of the Messiah’s visitation and His offer of the kingdom. Because of this His kingdom program was postponed (Matt. 21:42-43) and the people ended up crucifying Him on a cross out of blindness and ignorance of the worst sort.

The Scriptures make it abundantly clear that the Jews did kill Jesus out of spiritual ignorance, but kill Him they did. John 19:14-15 says, “And it was the preparation of the passover, and about the sixth hour: and he saith unto the Jews, Behold your King! But they cried out, Away with *him*, away with *him*, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar.” Luke 23:20-24, “Pilate therefore, willing to release Jesus, spake again to them. But they cried, saying, Crucify *him*, crucify him. And he said unto them the third time, Why, what evil hath he done? I have found no cause of death in him: I will therefore chastise him, and let *him* go. And they were instant with loud voices, requiring that he might be crucified. And the voices of them and of the chief priests prevailed. And Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they required.” Can anyone confuse these words? The Jews were responsible for the death of Jesus. Peter affirms this as being true when speaking to the Jews on the Day of Pentecost. Acts 2:22-24, “Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.” How much clearer can the Bible make it? The Jews were responsible for the death of Jesus. The Jews cried out, "His blood be on us and on our children" (Matthew 27:25). And so it was!

Zechariah 12:10 states what will happen when Jesus returns to the earth in the future. “And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications:

and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for *his* only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for *his* firstborn. Revelation 1:7, “Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they *also* which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen.” John 19:37, “And again another scripture saith, They shall look on him whom they pierced.” Jesus will one day say that He “was wounded in the house of my friends” (Zech. 12:6). It is inconceivable to me that liberal scholars and people-pleasing preachers can miss the simplicity of what the Bible says. The Jews killed Jesus. Israel needs to know this today if they are every going to be saved. Someday they will realize this for they will look upon Him “whom they have pierced” and realize that “he was wounded or our transgressions” (Isa. 53:5) and Israel will be saved (Rom. 11:26). The Jews killed Jesus. They were responsible for His death. They were the instigators of His death and the charge of piercing Jesus is actually attributed to the majority of the Jewish nation who were in favor of His death. How much clearer can the Bible make it before liberal scholars and unbelieving Christ-rejecting critics believe the Biblical account? Dear friend, just believe what the Bible says.

Why did the Jews kill Jesus? First, the Jews killed Jesus because He did not match up to their political and messianic expectations. The Jewish people were looking for a conquering king that would overthrow the Roman government and set up the kingdom promised in the covenants (Matt. 21:1-9). Had the Jewish people knew the Scriptures they would have also read that the Messiah would have to suffer at the hands of cruel people and die. However, their theology was both lopsided and only one-sided. They wanted the King without the crucifixion. They wanted the crown without the cross. They wanted glory without grace. The Jewish people could not see past the military Messiah concept (John 6:14-15). Jesus simply did not conform to the crowd’s messianic expectations. When Jesus failed to immediately conquer the Roman power and claimed that His kingdom was not of this world (John 18:36) the Jews quickly identified Jesus as an imposter who was only masking as the long-awaited King.

The prophecy of Isaiah 53:2-3 records the same truth in this way: “For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out

of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, *there is* no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were *our* faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.” Jesus did not look or act like a king or royal person when He came into the world and therefore the nation rejected Him as their Messiah. John 1:11 has some of the saddest words recorded in the Bible: “He came unto his own, and his own received him not.” Let the annals of history and biblical truth stand. The Jews rejected Jesus as their Messiah for political reasons and were responsible for His death. The conspiracy of the Jewish authorities represented the people’s hearts and the people themselves cried out to crucify the Lord of Glory. So the Jews killed Jesus for political reasons.

Second, the Jews killed Jesus because He was considered a blasphemer. Since the people rejected His messianic claims and deity they were quick to charge Him with blasphemy. Thus, the charge of blasphemy became the grounds for His death. John 19:7, “The Jews answered him, We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God.” This statement was a way to express Christ’s deity – that Jesus was equal with God. John 5:17-18, “But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work. Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God.” The Jews wanted Jesus dead. They felt He was an imposter of the Messiah. Nevertheless, His messianic claims and signs written in John’s Gospel were recorded to inform us that Jesus was the true Christ (John 20:30-31).

How very sad that His own people missed their Messiah and cried out for His death. Little did His own people realize that they were fulfilling God’s plan for the Messiah. Jesus had to die as a substitutionary sacrifice before He would reign as their political King. The cross would precede the crown in God’s plan. The rejecting of Jesus by the Jews and the subsequent falling of the Jews from national privilege would become the “riches of the world” and the “riches of the Gentiles” (Rom. 11:12) in that through Christ’s death millions of Gentiles would be saved and benefit from His sacrifice upon the cross. Israel’s ignorance resulted in our riches!

1. God killed Jesus (sovereignly)
2. The Romans killed Jesus (unlawfully)
3. The Jews killed Jesus (ignorantly)
4. We killed Jesus (sacrificially)

“Who killed Jesus? I would like to know.” The old spiritual song goes on to say, “I killed Jesus!” The Bible teaches that each one of us have sinned and broken God’s law (Rom. 3:23) and stand in an unrighteous state before God’s matchless holiness (Rom. 3:10). Sin condemns us to hell and separation from God’s presence forever (Rev. 20:12-15). Because of man’s predicament Jesus was nailed to the cross as a substitutionary sacrifice for each one of us so we might be saved from God’s wrath (Rom. 6:23) and be brought back into a right spiritual standing with God (2 Cor. 5:21).

Ephesians 5:2 reminds us that “... Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour.” Hebrews 9:26 echoes the same truth: “For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. Hebrews 10:12, “But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God.” We are the reason that Jesus died on the cross. Who killed Jesus? We did. The entire world of lost humanity really killed Jesus for it was on the cross that Jesus bore the sins of lost humanity and the judgment of hell connected with these sins. He became a sacrifice in our place bearing our sins and sin’s penalty, which is hell. The cross is not only a symbol of grace it is saving grace! Let’s embrace the cross for a moment.

1 Peter 2:24

“Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.”

Colossians 2:14

“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.”

1 Corinthians 15:3

“For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures.”

Galatians 1:4

“Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father.”

1 Peter 3:18

“For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit.”

Hebrews 9:27-28

“And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.”

1 John 4:10

“Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins.”

Through the death of Jesus, Jesus dying in our place and taking our sins and judgment upon Himself, we can be saved. Salvation comes into our lives when we, as a believing sinner, express simple faith or trust in the fact that Jesus died in our place, bearing our sins, and personally rely upon the death of Jesus Christ to save us from hell forever. Every lost sinner in the human race can receive the gift of eternal spiritual life in God’s presence forever by placing simple faith in what Jesus Christ had done for them on the cross. Acts 16:31, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved...” Romans 10:13, “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” This simple expression of faith means that we appropriate what Christ had done for us to our lives. When personally believing that Jesus died for us, bearing our own sins and judgment, we actually rely on the death of Jesus Christ to save us. When we do this we receive perfect justification before God (Rom. 3:28; 5:1). This means that we stand in God’s presence accepted by Him for all eternity.

Dear friend, Jesus died for you, as you, in your place, and in your stead. It was for you He died. It was for you that He hung on the cross. Who killed Jesus? The answer is this. I killed Jesus! Each one of us killed Jesus. Someone wrote:

“I should have been crucified.
I should have suffered and died.
I should have hung on the cross in despair.
But Jesus God’s Son took my place”

In the famous painting of the crucifixion by Rembrandt, your attention is drawn first to the dying Savior. Then, as you notice the crowd gathered around that scene at Calvary, you are impressed by the various attitudes and actions of the people involved in putting the Son of God to death. Finally your eyes drift to the edge of the picture and catch sight of a long figure almost hidden in the shadows. It is a figure or picture that represents the artist himself, for Rembrandt realized that his sins had helped nail Jesus to the cross!