

WHO REALLY CRUCIFIED JESUS?

There has never been a clearer case of innocence paying a price than that of Jesus being crucified. Question: How could the greatest crime in history turn out to be the best thing that ever happened to you and me? Bigger question: Who really crucified Jesus? Discover the answer and you'll never be the same.

INTRO

It's a death that has been spoken of—and debated—for 2000 years. The killing of Jesus. And always the finger pointing at who people think are the guiltiest in the crucifixion of the son of God. "The Jews did it", say some. "No, it was the Romans", say others. Or the priests. Or Pilate. Or...and the blame game goes on. But why did God allow it to happen? Why did Jesus not try to save His own skin? And as shocking as it sounds, how do you, dear listener, figure in on who really crucified Jesus? He claimed His love was More Than Talk. We are about to find out why.

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Crucifixion: A Medical View

It's happening more times than we'll ever know. An innocent person jailed or executed for a crime that he didn't commit, only to have the guilty person apprehended later. Like the man who spent years in prison for assaulting a woman before the real lookalike rapist was caught and confessed. But there has never been a clearer case of innocence paying a price than that of Jesus being crucified. No one was more innocent than He—yet He was manhandled, spat upon, brutalized and spiked to a cross.

When Christianity became the accepted religion of the Roman Empire, the Jews were accused and assaulted as His murderers. And over the next 1,700 years, Jewish people have been branded Christ—killers and guilty of deicide—the murder of God.

Thousands, even millions of Jews, counting the Holocaust, have been put to death on a trumped-up charge which has served as the main foundation of hate for people who want to hurt and destroy Jews. Looking for any excuse, haters have twisted the Bible and have twisted history to suit their evil aims.

But what are the real facts? Do Jews deserve to be branded as Christ-killers? Do the Romans? Does any group? Or was there an individual behind it all—a single person who was to blame for the death of the Son of God? If so, who was the person?

Some immediately answer, "Satan." That answer is not entirely correct—though the prince of evil has always been the master—mind of evil. There was somebody else to blame—and it's time the Church leads the way in telling the facts—as I am about to do.

What was it like for Jesus to be humiliated, beaten and put to death? Who really crucified Jesus Christ?

First of all, where did crucifixion originate? The definition of the word is simply the torture and execution of a person by fixation to a cross. You can trace this all the way back to the Persians.

It was later used by the Greeks. The Romans picked up this technique from others and refined it with typical Roman skill and cruelty.

Dr. C. Truman Davis put out a tremendous article called "The Crucifixion: A Medical View." He stated that the common cross form used in Jesus' day was the T-shaped cross. It really wasn't a cross like the one popularized in Christianity—you know with the top sticking up over the horizontal piece. It was more a capital "T" letter. There's archeological evidence that it was on this type of a cross, that Jesus was crucified. This, of course, would mean that a condemned man would only carry the horizontal part of what would become the cross—with that part still weighing more than 100 pounds. But let's go back a little further. When I read this story of Jesus while I headed for an island called Okinawa many years ago, I wept as I saw Him in the Garden of Gethsemane. Luke 22:44 says He was in such an agony that as He prayed His sweat

became as drops of blood trickling down upon the ground. Bible critics used to laugh at that and try to explain the phenomenon away as something that couldn't happen. Dr. Davis, though, in his article on the crucifixion said, "Though very rare, the phenomenon of hematidrosis or 'bloody sweat' is well documented. Under great emotional stress, tiny capillaries in the sweat glands can break, thus mixing blood with sweat. This process alone could have produced marked weakness and possible shock."

Now I was in the Garden of Gethsemane with Him, almost lifted, as it were, out of the body, this experience was so real. I could hear Him pray: "If it's possible, Father, let this cup pass from me." It was the Son of God talking to His Father in the Spirit. This side of heaven, theirs' will always remain a mysterious conversation. To me, Jesus was saying. "Is there any other way, Father? Any other way that I don't have to go through this?" Yet, how I loved the resignation that brought Him peace. "Nevertheless, not my will but Thine be done."

That will be important to remember. God's will that Christ die? God's will that He be nailed to a cross? God's will that He died in such horrible agony?

What was He sweating for? What was He bleeding for? There was no argument in my mind as to who crucified Jesus. He was praying in the garden for a man named Frank Eiklor. I was the one He was groaning over. The one He was concerned about. The one heading for what He knew to be a horrible eternity. He was out to keep me from hell—at any cost.

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History's Saddest Moment

We journey from Gethsemane's bloody sweat to the house of Caiaphas and judgment. Remember Pilate's hall with its mockery, spit, and terrible flogging? Here was Jesus with all the fire-power of heaven and yet accepting that mockery of human spittle on his face—and no record that He even reached to wipe it away.

I was transfixed by the gospel story. Someone else put a blind fold on Him and smashed Him across the head. After Jesus was beaten, His back, buttocks, shoulders and arms had flesh hanging in strips. Only then did they finally cut Him down and allow Him to slump, groaning, to the ground—wet with His own blood.

A robe was thrown over His shoulders and a small stick was pressed into His hand for a King's scepter. A crown of thorns was placed on His head and pulled down until it ripped into His scalp. Once again, tissue was torn with blood running in a 380 degree circle around His head dripping onto His shoulders, back and chest.

History's saddest moment was only beginning. The robe Jesus wore had become stuck to the blood and the flesh and skin came off with it. A heavy wooden beam was lashed to His back. This timber weighed more than 100 pounds, and in His battered condition, Jesus staggered beneath the load. He stumbled and fell. The rough wood gouged deeper into His body. The soldier, knowing their weakened victim would never make it to a hill called Golgotha without help, forced one Simon from Cyrene to carry Jesus' crossbeam the rest of the way.

It was a 650 yard journey from the fortress Antonia to Golgotha. A battered-beyond-recognition Jesus barely made it. Somehow He did make it. He knew that this was His appointed place.

He was thrown to the ground and pinned against the wood. One of the Roman legionnaires felt for the depression at the front of the wrist. That was the place for the spike so that there was no possibility that the weight of the body would break its hold and allow the body to shred and

fall from the cross. What may have looked like a railroad spike was driven through one wrist and then swiftly into the other. Then a spike was driven through His feet.

Powerful Romans muscles flexed as they lifted that hideous load on to what now formed a cross. It was customary to nail the accusation to the cross of the condemned man so all would

know His crime. The words concerning Jesus were dictated by Pilate—"Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." They were written in Greek, Hebrew and Latin—so all the world would understand.

Davis wrote, "Hanging by the arms, the pectoral muscles, the large muscles of the chest, were paralyzed and the intercostal muscles, the small muscles between the ribs, were unable to act. Air could be drawn to the lungs but could not be exhaled. Jesus fought to raise Himself in order to get one short breath. Finally, the carbon dioxide level increased in the lungs, and the blood stream, and cramps partially subsided."

He was now near death. The dying process was tortured as He tried to say something. His words were deliberate—tender. "Father, forgive them for they don't know what they do."

Then He took time while dying to saved a repentant thief who was dying next to Him. "Today," He said, "you will be with Me in paradise."

He was so lonely as He hung there dying. The only disciple around Him was John. Jesus looked at His mother, whose Jewish heart was broken. He said, "Woman, behold your son." And then the great eyes, now glazed, looked toward young John: "Behold your mother." The two would be together from then on.

The next cry was almost a scream of anguish. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" The 22nd Psalm foretold this frightening moment. His tongue had virtually stuck to the roof of His mouth as Jesus groaned, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani." It didn't sound clear. Some thought He was calling for Elijah. But He was crying out in torment, for in that moment God appeared to have abandoned His beloved Son.

Jesus had become something that is impossible for us to comprehend—the sin—bearing lamb taking on the sins of the world? The Bible teaches that He was sin for us who knew no sin so that we would be made the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21). The Bible also says in Isaiah 53:10 that it pleased God to bruise Him. He put Him to grief in order to make Him a sacrifice, an atonement for the sins of mankind. For your sins! For mine!

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Mission Accomplished

Medical science tells us that another horrible agony began as Jesus' end approached. A suffocating, crushing pain began in the chest in the sac around the heart called the pericardium, as it slowly filled with serum and began to compress His heart. A thousand years earlier the psalmist in the twenty-second Psalm had prophesied of its intensity when He said, "I am poured out like water and all my bones are out of joint. My heart is like wax. It is melted in the midst of my bowels." Yeshua, the Jew, was almost dead now.

Dr. C. Truman Davis described the final agony. "The end was rapidly approaching. The loss of tissue fluids had reached a critical level. The compressed heart was struggling to pump heavy, thick, sluggish blood to the tissue. The tortured lungs were making a frantic effort to inhale small gulps of air. The markedly dehydrated tissues sent their blood of stimuli to the brain."

Here's when Jesus uttered His fifth tormented cry. "I thirst." He could feel the coldness of death quietly sweeping over His mangled body. Perhaps His sixth saying was little more than a whisper of agony. "It is finished." Mission accomplished.

But He knew that you and I had been bought and paid for in those hellish, horrible hours when He hung suspended like a piece of meat between heaven and earth. It seems His breathing was almost ready to stop. But then there followed a last great surge as He summoned a hidden reservoir of strength for final cry. "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." Suddenly, yet quietly, the struggle was over. The chest stopped heaving. The eyes no longer rolled. The great head hung limply with the chin pressing softly against the chest.

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son"? Could it be true? My heavenly Father now looks at me as we slowly walk away from the scene of death. He knows—and I know—that it's all too true. Thank God. It's all too true. Because just as spring follows winter, so too did resurrection follow death. It had to. You see, you can't kill love. You can curse love, reject love, nail love to a cross, but you can't change it. It's still love and so it rises again to repeat the refrain, "I love you, I love you."

But now, having watched Him die—having witnessed such sacrificial love—we must settle the argument. Who crucified Jesus? Some point the finger at the Jewish crowd that bellowed, "Let Him be crucified!" But does that take in all of the Jewish people? The prior reaction of the Jews showed that great multitudes loved Jesus.

But then, how do you explain the crucifixion? Was it political opportunism? Or fickle human changeableness? (After all, the Bible describes the human heart as "deceitful above all things and desperately wicked" Jeremiah 17:9). Or was it plain jealousy? Or a fear of Jesus? It was all that and more. The crucifixion involved Satan's rage against God as well as God's love for His world.

We also know that certain Jewish leaders did not want to provoke a riot. For example, in Mark 14:2 they decided not to arrest Him on the feast day “lest there be an uproar of the people.” An uproar of the people? What people? Not Gentiles. Those were Jewish people who would have championed the cause of Jesus. We also know that they judged Jesus during the night in a kangaroo—court trial that was a mockery of justice. Why did they do it at night (according to Matthew 26:31 and 27:1)? Because to do this during the day would have been to put themselves in jeopardy with the Jewish multitudes who would not have stood for it. These leaders feared the Jewish people.

Judas had tried to force Christ’s hand. He may have wanted Jesus to assume all powers, restore the kingdom to Israel, and take His Messianic prerogative as the King of kings. Or he may simply have been a common thief. Jesus called him “the son of perdition” (John 17:12). But even Judas the betrayer cried out and said Jesus was innocent.

Then there were the people. Some were caught in frenzy. Reason had fled. We know that Scripture says the priests incited a mob and “...the chief priests moved the people that he (Pilate) should rather release Barabbas unto them” (Mark 15:11). But this mob certainly did not constitute the Jewish populace that held Jesus in such esteem. Who crucified Jesus? We must continue our search for the answer.

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Playing The Blame Game

The priests had already sold out to Rome rather than listen to the common people. When Pilate asked, "Shall I crucify your king?" Jewish leaders answered, "We have no king but Caesar," (John 19:15). There is no doubt that if they had gone to the general public of Judea and told them that Caesar was their only king, many would have said, "Caesar isn't our king! God is!" Flavius Josephus, the Jewish historian, described the priests as "opulent, rapacious, a caste, despotic toward the people, servile toward the Romans."

Times haven't changed. Look around you today. A large number of ministers serve in churches for a mere livelihood—not as calling from the Lord. And while we have a great number of Christians serving God lovingly and sacrificially, there are others who function under one main impulse—greed. That's life. The bad and the good—just like 2000 years ago.

We know that during the crucifixion there was a minority of Jews living in Israel who were opposed to Jesus. But what about the diaspora Jews—those living outside the land of Israel? The fame of Jesus had not reached far beyond the borders of Israel. But what would happen at Passover? At such a momentous time, Jewish people came from many countries. The one place to be was Jerusalem—and the temple. And since Jews had known the diaspora for some eight centuries, the numbers making pilgrimage must have been great.

This appears to be borne out in Scripture. In Matthew 21:10, 11, when Jesus made His triumphal entrance into Jerusalem, great multitudes of Jews said, "Who is this?" Others answered, "This is Jesus of Nazareth." Who were answering? The Israeli Jews who knew of Jesus and His fame. Who were asking? Could it not have been the multitudes of diaspora Jews who had come into the city for Passover? And could a number of these "Outsiders" have joined the rabble that demanded Jesus' crucifixion?

But what about the verse in Matthew 27:25: "His blood be on us and on our children?" That statement has been used by more hate-filled men and women to destroy the Jewish people by employing the "Christ killer" theme than any other charge. Even Hitler used the excuse.

Who were the Jews who made that foolish statement? Certainly not the whole Jewish people, but instead some envious, jealous leaders and their hand-picked mob. To implicate "all the Jews" is as ludicrous as it would be for the Jews to call all Gentiles "Lincoln-killers" because some Gentiles plotted the murder of Abraham Lincoln.

The statements, "His blood be on us and on our children" is used when people want to isolate and hurt the Jews. But Jesus said something else as He died, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." Whose statement will stand up more before

God—a few hate-filled leaders who said, “His blood be on us and on our children,” or the Son of God Himself who said, “Forgive them. They don’t know what they do?”

Who crucified Jesus? Let’s discuss another group of people—those who believed in Him. Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead. But where was Lazarus at the crucifixion? He is conspicuously absent was he afraid? Even cowardly?

How about John? Even John, who appeared later at the cross when he finally had second thoughts, ran out on Jesus in the garden.

And Peter? He cursed and denied even knowing Christ—not once but three times—even in front of a young girl who had cornered him. Peter cursed! How low can you stoop as a believer? But lest you look at those first “Christians” and say, “Yes, how terrible they were,” believe me, friend, you and I would have done the same thing.

These people were overrun by fast moving events. The silence of Jesus’ followers like John, Lazarus, Nicodemus, and Joseph (some of whom only identified with Jesus after He had died), however rationalized, helped end the physical life of Jesus. So if we’re going to say that “the Jews crucified Jesus,” we must bring in the fact that the “Christians,” the believers in Jesus, crucified Him by selling Him out. And what is worse—denying someone when you don’t have the light of His love in your life, or denying Him even after your eyes have been opened and you have professed faith that person?

How about the priests? There is no doubt that the priests were guilty. Jesus Himself said, “The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, the chief priests and scribes, and be slain, and be raised the third day” (Luke 9:22). Notice He mentioned certain classes of Jewish leaders—not all the Jewish people, many of whom believed in Him and some of whom were his Jewish disciples who loved Him.

Our search continues. There is more to finding out who really crucified Jesus.

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Who Crucified Jesus? Mystery Solved

What about the Romans? The power of Rome was in Pilate's hands. All he had to do to stop the crime of history was to say, "No!" Even if Jews leaders would have said, "We'll have to tell Caesar that you're no friend of his," Pilate could have countered, "You evil leaders. I will not only go to Caesar myself, but I'll have you punished for such a statement," No, Pilate sold Him out.

And the soldier? Some say it was their duty to obey. Today we punish soldiers who commit atrocities. Nazis stood at Nuremberg and said they were only obeying orders. It didn't work, for the duty to obey does not justify a crime.

You're seeing it clearer, aren't you—that the crucifixion of Christ is one of contradictions and complexities. This unequalled event in human history was fast-moving action. We see the Jews involved. We see Jesus' own disciples who parted company with Him. We see guilty Romans and guilty priests, high officials and humble citizens, who could have helped but by then were just swept by the tide, some watching, some crying, some walking away disgusted, but no one doing anything. Military, political and civilian guilt travelled full circle.

What is the answer to "Who crucified Jesus?" We must bring God into the matter. The fifty-third chapter of Isaiah states that Jesus was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities. Verse six states: "All we like sheep have gone astray." Since God says that "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23), Isaiah was speaking of all the world. Each of us had turned to "his own way." And God had laid on His chosen Messiah the sins of us all. Scripture is clear that God sanctioned the death of Jesus.

Verse 12 says, "Therefore it pleased the Lord to bruise him." Pleased God to bruise His only Son? Why? So that He could become the atonement. The verse continues "When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see His seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand." God the Father could have stopped the crucifixion—but He would have had to withdraw His love for a lost world. For you. For me.

Jesus Himself could have stopped it. He said, "The Father knows me and even so I know the Father and I lay down my life for the sheep." What sheep? First, He was referring to His Jewish flock, but in verse 16 He says "other sheep I have which are not of this fold"—referring to the Gentiles. To the whole world. Concerning His life, Jesus said, "No man takes it from me. No Gentile takes it from me. No soldier. No priest." Then again. This commandment have I received of my Father."

Is it any wonder that, according to verse 19, there was another argument among the Jewish people. Some said Jesus must have a devil to say such things. Others said, "No, these are not the words of a devil." How awesome it must have been to know that here was someone standing in your midst claiming to have come forth from God and that He would die for the sins of the world!

It's easy looking back at history. But how would you like to have been standing there? To have been, for example, one of the earthly brothers of Jesus and have Him look at you and say, "Before Abraham was, I am." Or can you imagine him saying, "I am the good shepherd?" Or, "I am the resurrection and the life?" The Bible says that Jesus' own Family members didn't believe in Him. Neither would you nor I have believed. It's easy to believe now that we can look back. But if we would have been there, we would have been run over by the same events.

But it's time now to let the Scriptures nail down who crucified Jesus. Acts 4:27, 28 states: "For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and people of Israel, were gathered together. For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done." Herod, Pontius Pilate, Gentiles, and Israel—that takes in the world. It includes everybody. And the book is clear that "the world" could only do what God's hand and counsel "determined before to be done." God allowed this greatest story in history to run all the way to the crucifixion. Who crucified Jesus? You did. I did. Our sins did. He died for you. Because He loves you. Because His love is more than talk!

WRAP

The greatest story doesn't end in a graveyard. Neither will your life end in a grave. God the Father—your heavenly father raised Jesus Christ from the dead. That is a proven fact of history—and now He wants to come into your life and take away all your sin, guilt and fear. Will you take Him by faith right now. Pray with me.

“Lord Jesus, I need you. Thank you for dying for me. I believe you were raised from the dead and that you can change my life. I ask you to do it—starting right now. Amen”

Now get in touch with us. Jim will tell you how. We want to help you grow. God bless you until we get together again for More Than Talk.