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FOR THE SOWER ISA.55:10 FOR THE EATER
BRIEF BIBLICAL MESSAGES FROM

THE WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRY

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WHO CRUCIFIED JESUS?

If the answer to the question raised in the subject of this study is, "The Jews - not only those who lived then, but all their descendants who have lived since then," the answer is wrong, it is libelous, and it is slanderous. Furthermore, it flatly contradicts the plain statements made in the four Gospels, all of which can be summed up by the epigrammatic statements: **"And the common people heard Him gladly"** (Mark 12:37); and, **"All the people were very attentive to hear Him"** (Luke 19:48). Inasmuch as "the common people" made up the great bulk of the Jews who then lived in Palestine, it is nothing more than anti-Semitic prejudice to say that the Jews crucified Jesus.

Yet, the average Christian believes that this is what the Bible teaches. In fact, this indictment is so sweeping that the five and one-half million Israelites who lived outside of Palestine are included along with the two and one-half million Israelites who lived in the land. And by some figment of Satanically-inspired imagination, this guilt is also charged to all their descendants, so much so that the epithet "Christ-killer" as a synonym for "Jew" has been in common use for almost nineteen hundred years.

Since, as a Christian, I believe that all guilt is personal, that it is never inherited, and that it cannot be collective beyond those actually involved, I repudiate altogether the idea that any Jew living today had anything to do, even remotely, with the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. And I often wonder if some professing Christians have any knowledge whatsoever of Peter's great declaration recorded in Acts 4:27, 28: **"For of a truth against Thy holy Servant Jesus, Whom Thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever Thy hand and Thy counsel determined**

before to be done."

In order to honestly answer the question which is before us, we need to have some degree of familiarity with the political and economic situation that existed in Palestine in A.D. 33. To keep it as simple as possible, we need only to understand and consider the great gulf that existed between the two classes of people who lived then in the land of Israel - the rich and the poor, or to state it in other terms, the aristocracy and the common people. A rich and powerful aristocracy had created a veritable caste system. These two classes stand out distinctly in the four Gospels, and it seems that none ever passed from one class to another. Since it was not a money economy or system, to be among the rich in Israel was not based upon the possession of money, but on power, influence, social position, education, and learning. The poor had none of these, and it was impossible for them to obtain them.

The three main groups that made up the aristocracy in Palestine were the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herodians. These were all Jews. They are further classified according to their positions as elders, lawyers, Levites, scribes, priests, and rulers. These formed an oligarchy (the rule of a few) that controlled all political, religious, and economic life in Israel. Their power was much greater than their number. They were not all bad men. The finest men in Israel could be found among them, but they were too few to have the balance of power.

The Lord Jesus castigated and rejected this powerful oligarchy very early in His ministry by saying: "**Woe unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation**" (Luke 6:24). These were the men who had the favored place in the *status quo* in Palestine, and they had trampled under foot the majority of their brethren in order to get such a place. When they came to John's baptism, he rejected them on the spot (Matt. 3:7). And, very early in the ministry of our Lord, their malignant opposition to Him came to the surface (Matt. 9:34).

At about the end of the second year of His ministry, we find that "**from that time forth began Jesus to show unto His disciples, how that He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders, the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed and be raised again the third day**" (Matt. 16:21). This was something with which the outspoken Peter did not agree, and he so declared it in few words. Again the Lord said, "**The Son of Man is delivered into the hands of men, and they shall kill Him; and**

after He is killed, He shall rise the third day" (Mark 9:31). At this point He did not positively identify the men into whose hands He would be delivered, but later He does. In Luke 18:31 He declared: "**Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man shall be accomplished. For He shall be delivered to the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on: And they shall scourge Him, and put Him to death: and the third day He shall rise again.**"

From these statements we can conclude that if Jesus was "delivered to the Gentiles," then Pontius Pilate, the Roman prefect of Judea, had complete juridical and administrative responsibility for the trial and crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

The death of Jesus Christ was a predetermined matter in the counsels of God. "**Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He hath put Him to grief"** (Isa. 53:10). His death could happen only at God's appointed time; and when this time came, a virtual army guided by Judas Iscariot came, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and elders of the people (Matt. 26:47). Arrested, He was led away to Caiaphas, the high priest, where the scribes and elders were assembled. These sought false witnesses against Jesus to put Him to death. At last, after much searching, they found two, who gave the flimsy testimony that He had said He was able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days (Matt. 26:57-61).

Our Lord refused to answer these ridiculous charges, which caused the high priest to angrily demand of Him, "**I adjure Thee by the living God, that Thou tell us whether Thou be the Christ, the Son of God"** (Matt. 26:63). Jesus answered him by saying, "**Thou hast said.**" Many take this to be a positive affirmation, but it could mean that He is saying to Caiaphas, "You have made the charge, now prove it or disprove it." Whatever it may mean, it caused the high priest to foam with rage.

The Lord Jesus had been arrested at night, and when morning came, all the chief priests and elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put Him to death; so they bound Him and delivered Him to Pontius Pilate, the governor (Matt. 27: 1, 2). From this moment on He is in the hands of a Gentile who can either release Him or condemn Him, and who after some dramatic moments, ordered Him to be scourged and delivered Him to be

crucified. One of these dramatic moments came when the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask for the robber, Barabbas, and demand the destruction of Jesus (Matt. 27:15-22). Thus, a multitude becomes guiltily involved in the conspiracy against Him.

We wonder about the number and character of those involved. It was early in the morning, so it was not a "great multitude"; and quite a few in it may have been pro-Barabbas partisans who had assembled early in the morning hoping for his release. However, in answer to the question, "Who crucified Jesus?" we can say that in view of the Biblical facts, the guilty parties were the Pharisees, Sadducees, scribes, rulers of the people, and also a multitude, who at the urging of the chief priests and elders demanded His death. But it must also be noted that the ultimate juridical decision and the order for His execution was made by Pontius Pilate, a Gentile.

It was the soldiers of the governor, Gentiles all, who took Jesus into the common hall, stripped Him of His clothes, and put upon Him an old scarlet robe. It was these Gentiles who platted the crown of thorns and sadistically crushed it down upon His brow. All of this was gratuitous on their part, as it was no part of the chief priest's and elder's demands, nor any part of the governor's orders. However, after He was crucified, the chief priests, elders, and scribes joined in the mockery. Thus, if there is any such thing as collective guilt or inherited guilt, all the descendants of the Romans would be equally guilty with the Jews.

Of course, there will be many who will raise the familiar fact that after Pilate declared his personal freedom from guilt in the death of Jesus, all the people there assembled declared, **"His blood be upon us, and on our children"** (Matt. 27 :25). This declaration, many seem to think, made all Jews guilty along with all their descendants.

In considering this we must ask two questions: "Who said this?" and, "Were they the official spokesmen for the eight million Jews who then lived upon the earth?" The answers to these questions are obvious. It was not a representative body, and no one had appointed them to speak for all Israel.

The logical thinker will recognize at once that their statement, "His blood be upon us," did not make them any more guilty than they already were; and the additional words, "and on our children," are utterly meaningless so far as being effective is concerned. They could no more bring guilt upon their children than Pilate, the Gentile, could cleanse himself of guilt by publicly

washing his hands before them (Matt. 27:24).

And yet, no matter who or how many can be charged with guilty complicity in the death of Jesus Christ, it must be remembered that while He hung upon the cross, He looked down upon His tormentors and prayed: **"Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do"** (Luke 23:34).

I have often said that if this prayer were not answered, I would have no reason to believe that any of mine or yours would ever be answered. It was this prayer that led Peter to say in his second great message, **"And now, brethren, I am aware that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers"** (Acts 3: 17) .

Thus, the answer is clear. A small number of powerful Jews along with a weak-kneed Gentile governor brought about the crucifixion of Jesus. According to our Lord and to Peter, they did it in ignorance. If they had only known the hidden wisdom which was later revealed by Paul, **"they would not have crucified the Lord of glory"** (I Cor. 2:8).

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