

Are The Jews Cursed For Deicide?

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Either out of a genuine concern for justice or out of a sardonic resistance to the Jews' petty politics, Pontius Pilate wanted to free Christ. Lacking in the end the requisite moral strength, he remanded Christ over to the garrison for crucifixion, but not until he had literally "washed his hands" of the whole affair. Matthew alone tells us that, at this juncture in the proceedings, "All the people answered and said, 'His blood be on us and on our children.'" The phrase "all the people" probably refers to the rabble, instigated by the Temple leaders.

They did nothing other than what God had ordained from the foundation of the world. No more, no less! Furthermore, in the execution of God's plan, *both* Gentile and Jew had a hand. Notice Acts 4:27-28, which records the words of Peter and John:

For truly against Your Holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done.

However, not all are given to see the hand of God so clearly as Peter and John saw it. Concerning Matthew 27:25, one former minister of the church of God commented that God would be "remiss" (that is, lax in carrying out His duties) if He did not bring this statement on the Jews' heads. In making that statement, he tacitly expressed his agreement with the "blood libel"—the traditional Catholic and Protestant interpretation of this passage as a self-imposed curse that God has honored over the centuries.

Properly understood, however, the peoples' statement is absolutely *not* a curse. Moreover, God has nowhere bound Himself to chastise Jewry as a whole for the actions of a relatively few people in Pilate's judgment hall that morning.

"The Soul Who Sins Shall Die"

The peoples' comment indicates the strength of their conviction that Christ was an enemy of God and the nation. They were thoroughly persuaded that their actions in pursuit of Christ's death were correct. Rather than being a curse, their statement emphasizes the *extent* of their deception. For, as sincere as they were, they were totally wrong in seeking Christ's death, utterly blind to the reality that He was their hoped-for Messiah. Their comment was a formula: "We know we're right, and we're willing to die for our stance. So sure are we that we're willing to stake our children's lives on our position as well."

In stating their convictions in those terms, they betrayed their lack of understanding of God's law, for they based their statement on the incorrect belief that God punishes children for their parents' sins. The prophet Ezekiel speaks at length of this erroneous idea and of the misleading proverb it had engendered over the years. He quotes the false proverb in Ezekiel 18:2: "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge."

A question the disciples asked of Christ, recorded in John 9:2, indicates that they too were still under the spell of this false proverb. Concerning the blindness of a particular man, they ask, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Christ, not accepting the false premise of their question, comes up with a totally different reason: "that the works of God should be revealed in him" (verse 3).

The disciples in John 9—and the Jews in Matthew 27—made their statement at a time when God's prophecy, expressed in Ezekiel 18:3, had not come to pass: "'As I live,' says the Lord God, 'you shall no longer use this proverb in Israel.'"

In Christ's day—and down to our own!—people still believed that God punished children for the sins of the fathers. Beginning in Ezekiel 18:4, God sets forth four scenarios to point out the fallacy of this manmade belief. Notice verses 14 and 17, part of the third scenario:

If, however, [a man] begets a son who sees all the sins which his father has done, and considers but does not do likewise, . . . [but rather] has executed My judgments and walked in My statutes—he shall not die for the iniquity of his father; he shall surely live!

God summarizes the teachings of these four scenarios in verse 20:

The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself.

In saying this, God is telling us that He Himself follows the law He established for us, recorded in Deuteronomy 24:16: "The fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor shall the children be put to death for their fathers; a person shall be put to death for his own sin."

Amaziah obeyed this law when "he executed his servants who had murdered his father the king. However he did not execute their children. . . ." The writer of Chronicles then continues by quoting Deuteronomy 24:16 verbatim (see II Chronicles 25:3-4). Though Exodus 20:5; 34:7; Numbers 14:18; Deuteronomy 5:9; Isaiah 14:21; and Jeremiah 32:18 seem to contradict this principle, these verses speak, not of God's judgment for sin, which is always on the perpetrator himself, but of the disastrous consequences of the fathers' sins affecting "the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate Me."

Nowhere does Matthew—nor anyone else—ever tell us that God acquiesced to carry out vengeance on those who cried, "Crucify Him!" before Pilate's judgment hall. Nowhere does Matthew intimate that God consented to punish their children over the centuries. If He had committed Himself to carry out these peoples' so-called "curse," He would have knowingly bound Himself to violate His own law for centuries.

"To the Jew First"

Why, then, have the Jews found themselves so often in such dire straits over the years, not only after the crucifixion of Christ, but for centuries *before*? They have been persecuted by the Egyptians, the Philistines, the Edomites, the Canaanites, the Sidonians, the Hivites, the Moabites (see Judges 3:3-12), and the Midianites (see Judges 8:1). The catalog of their tormentors includes the Persians of

Haman's time, the Greeks of Antiochus' time, the Romans of Imperial times, and afterwards various European and Muslim peoples to the present. Their history of persecution would fill volumes.

Why?

Anciently, *only* the Israelites, of which the Jews are one tribe, were the recipients of God's revelation: "You only have I known of all the families of the earth" (Amos 3:2). God counts that revelation as a precious blessing to the family of Abraham, as Paul writes in Romans 3:1-2: "What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision? Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God."

To Paul, the Jews were not cursed, but were *first*, the Greeks second (Romans 2:9-10). He took seriously his commission to carry God's name "before . . . the children of Israel" (Acts 9:15). The book of Acts records that in every town and city he visited, he went first to the local Jewish synagogue; after that, he preached the gospel to the Gentiles. Indeed, he admonished the church at Thessalonica to "become imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea . . ." (I Thessalonians 2:14).

God gave the Jews a lot. Here, the principle of Luke 12:48 enters the picture: "For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more."

As we know from the Old Testament and as history since has demonstrated, the Jews have repeatedly rejected God, treading His oracles underfoot. Today, many are the Jews who have forsaken God and joined the vanguard of liberal secularism (read "atheism") in the arts, law, politics, science, education—in virtually every field of human endeavor. Throughout their history, many Jews have scorned God's revelation, purposefully making themselves a profane people. So, the corollary of Christ's principle applies, as stated in Luke 12:47: "And that servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes."

The Jews, more than any single people in history, knew God's will, as it is expressed in the "oracles"—His revelation to them. They often have rejected it. As often as they do, their apostasy has carried with it the penalty of "many stripes."

This cycle of rejecting God and paying the price will not go on forever. Though Jerusalem and the tribe of Judah will be "a cup of drunkenness to all the surrounding peoples" and "a very heavy stone for all peoples" (Zechariah 12:2-3) in the end time, the Jews will be among the first to turn to the returning Christ:

"The Lord will save the tents of Judah first. . . . And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they have pierced; they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn. . . . In that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness. It shall be in that day," says the Lord of hosts, "that I will cut off the names of the idols from the land, and they shall no longer be remembered. I will also cause the [false] prophets and the unclean spirit to depart from the land." (Zechariah 12:7, 10; 13:1-2)

At that time, both the burden of supposed blood libel and the cycle of rejecting God will be laid aside, and the Jews can begin anew as a people under the rule of Jesus Christ in His millennial Kingdom.