



Light of Messiah Ministries

.....proclaiming Jesus, the Jewish Messiah!

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WHO KILLED JESUS?

The dialogue has begun and will continue in earnest for much of the year. Mel Gibson's movie "The Passion" will be opening in theaters around the country in March, just in time for the Easter and Passover season. Reviews indicate the movie is going to be exceptional. The only negative comment I have heard is that the crucifixion scene is so graphic and emotional that some who saw previews almost had to leave. **The movie has been hailed by evangelical Christians as historically, theologically, and biblically accurate, following the text of Scripture in detail.**

Billy Graham says, "I doubt that there has been a more graphic or moving presentation of Jesus' death and resurrection..." **Paul Harvey** writes, "From the gripping opening scene in the Garden of Gethsemane, to the very human and tender portrayal of the earthly ministry of Jesus, through the betrayal, the arrest, the scourging, the surrender on the Cross, until the final scene in the empty tomb, this was not simply a movie; it was an encounter unlike anything I have ever experienced..." "The Passion" evoked more deep reflection, sorrow and emotional reaction within me than anything since my wedding, my ordination, or the birth of my children."

So, what is all the fuss about?

Many in the Jewish community are concerned about the movie, stating that it portrays the Jewish people the ones who killed Christ. They are also concerned that the movie will promote anti-Jewish sentiment around the world. Abraham Foxman, head of the Anti-Defamation League, a Jewish civil



rights organization, has argued for months that "the portrayal of the Jews in the events leading to the crucifixion will promote anti-Semitism."

The debate will intensify after the movie officially opens. Newspapers and magazines will feature articles, discussions, debates, and editorials, on the issue. **The country will, for a time, be discussing the issue and asking the question, "Who killed Jesus?"**

So, what are we to do when our Jewish friends ask us what we think about the movie? (And they will!) How will you respond after seeing the movie when your Jewish friend asks you, "Do you think the Jews killed Jesus?" or "Do you think I killed Jesus?" How are we to respond to Jewish people who ask us about the film being "anti-Semitic"?

In this month's letter I would like to give you historical perspectives on, and practical ways to address, this most important issue. Keep this letter, copy it, and pass it on. I hope it is helpful.

Historical and Biblical Perspectives

"The Passion" (or crucifixion of Jesus) historically occurred within a Jewish context. The writers of the New Testament were Jewish. Jesus came as the Jewish Messiah. **There have been people who have misused the New Testament for anti-Semitic purposes.** But the New Testament is not an anti-Semitic book nor is "The Passion" an anti-Semitic event. Jewish people calling for the crucifixion of another Jewish person were not being anti-Semitic. Those Jewish leaders, who wanted Jesus gone, wanted Him gone for political and religious reasons. They were not being anti-Semitic. They were looking after their own interests at the time (as were the Romans!)

Though the New Testament account of the crucifixion clearly presents a Jewish mob calling for the crucifixion of Jesus and asking for Barabbas, **not all Jewish people wanted Him crucified. Those calling for His crucifixion were primarily the Jewish leaders of His day.** Also remember that there were many Jewish people accepting Jesus as Messiah, and were mourning the event.

Crucifixion was a Roman, not Jewish, form of execution. Though there was an angry Jewish mob calling for the crucifixion of Jesus, it was the Romans, not the Jewish people, who carried it out.

MOST IMPORTANTLY....

- ♦ **Jesus had to die.** The prophet Isaiah clearly wrote, 750 years before Jesus, that the Messiah would die for the sins of the Jewish people, and for all people. The sacrificial system was not enough. It was insufficient due to human weak-

ness. God knew that we could not save ourselves, so He made the way for us through the sacrificial death of Jesus. "He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities...and by HIS wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray, each has turned to his own way, but the Lord has laid upon Him the iniquity of us all." Isaiah 53:5-6 **Jesus had to die.**

- ◆ **Jesus chose to die.** He laid His life down. Jesus said that He "had the power to lay His life down and to raise it back up again." Jesus had the power to stop the crucifixion. He had the power to come off of the cross. But, Jesus, submitting to the will of the Father, took His place on the cross and gave His life for the sins of humanity. **The way of the cross was chosen by Jesus.**

- ◆ **We all killed Jesus.** Or, put another way, Jesus died for all of us. Billy Graham aptly said when asked about the issue, "*It is our sins that caused his death, not any one particular group.*" No one person or group of people are guilty of His death. **He willingly died for the sins of humanity.**

Practical Ways to Address the Issue

If your Jewish friend (or anyone else) asks you about the movie here are some ways to discuss the issue sensitively...

Make sure they have seen the movie. If a person has not seen the movie, encourage them to see it. At that point you will have a common point from which to discuss the issue. If someone has made a decision about the content of the movie without seeing it, they are not being fair. In order to discuss the movie fairly they need to see the movie.

Communicate the importance of the event for the Christian faith. The death and resurrection of Jesus is central to the faith of all Christians. The intent of the movie is to give a visual picture of an event, not characterize any one group of people.



Take your friend to Isaiah Chapter 53 and have them read it to you, out loud. Ask them who they think it sounds like. This passage clearly gives the Old Testament foundation for the crucifixion of Jesus as Messiah. **Other passages which speak of the crucifixion in the Old Testament are Psalm 22 and Zechariah 12:10** ("...and they shall look upon Him whom they have pierced and they shall mourn as one mourns for an only son.").

Put the movie into a Jewish context. You may share some of the information in the Historical Perspectives section of this letter.

Express your understanding that there have been many people who have persecuted Jewish people in the name of Jesus for 2000 years. Many people have misused the New Testament to promote anti-Semitism. People who have called themselves Christians have vehemently hated Jewish people. You may say, "*I am sorry for what people have done to the Jewish people in the name of Jesus. But, one cannot hate the Jewish people and love Jesus at the same time. Anyone who hates Jewish people cannot be a real Christian because Jesus, himself, was Jewish. I am indebted to the Jewish people because if it were not for your people I would not have Jesus, my Bible, or my faith.*"

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Remember to tell them that Jesus... had to die and chose to die. For those who know Jesus, this is GOOD NEWS, and surely no reason to be angry with the Jewish people.

The most important thing to do is to use the controversy surrounding the movie "The Passion" to open dialogue, increase communication, and bring understanding to an issue that has been misunderstood by many for 2000 years!

If you need help or have any more questions about this issue please contact our ministry.

PASSOVER BANQUET 2004

Our annual Passover Banquet will be held at the J.W. Marriott at Lenox on Saturday evening, April 10th. We are sending out registration information early this year because of the great demand. Last year 500 people joined us for one of our most exciting nights of the year. Make your reservations now! Last year we had a waiting list, so don't procrastinate! **We must have you reservations by Friday, April 2nd.** We encourage you to bring your friends and small groups as well as your Jewish friends. Please call our office to make reservations at 770-642-4706. **YOU MAY ALSO ORDER TICKETS ONLINE AT OUR WEB SITE: www.lightofmessiah.org**

Thank You!

As always thank you for standing with us in our ministry to the Jewish people. **Your prayers and financial support help make our ministry possible.**

Please keep our staff in your prayers.

Serving Him,

Murray Tilles...for the staff
 Light of Messiah Ministries