**WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DEATH OF CHRIST?**

 **As succinct proof for the existence of God a wise man once remarked, “The Jews.” What led him to make such a remarkable claim?**

 **Two things must be considered together as verification that God exists based on claiming ‘the Jews’ as proof:**

 ***The first*: God made a declaration in the Bible where He says, “The One who gives the sun for light by day, the fixed order of moon and stars for light by night, who stirs up the sea and makes its waves roar — Yahweh of Hosts is His name: If this fixed order departs from My presence – this is the Lord’s declaration – then also Israel’s descendants will cease to be a nation before Me forever.” (Jeremiah 31:35-36). The entire chapter of Jeremiah 31 details God’s love for Israel.**

**Also recorded is Zechariah 2:8 “For the Lord of Hosts says this: “He has sent Me for His glory against the nations who are plundering you, for anyone who touches you touches the apple of His eye.”**

 **Considering this love in light of Israel’s consistent turning from her God, John Stott writes:**

**“Because of the history of Israel’s apostasy, the prophets concentrated on Yahweh’s anger and consequent judgment. But the reason why this threat of national destruction is so poignant is that it was uttered against the background of God’s love for Israel, his choice of them and his covenant with them. This special relationship with Israel, which God had initiated and sustained, and which he promised to renew, had also arisen out of his character. He had acted ‘for the sake of his name’. He had not set his love upon Israel and chosen them because they were more numerous than other peoples, for they were the fewest. No, he had set his love upon them only because he loved them (Dt. 7:7-8). No explanation of his love for them could be given, except his love for them.” [THE CROSS OF CHRIST, John R. W. Stott (InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois, © John R. W. Stott 1986), pp. 126-127.]**

***The second*: despite repeated, forceful attempts to remove or destroy the Jews, the Jews exist as a distinct people. They are the only ancient people ever exiled from their land, dispersed over the earth, repeatedly persecuted often to death, yet, who have maintained their cultural distinctive, resurrected their ancient language and finally, been regathered into their ancient homeland.**

 **What is God’s attitude toward the Jews? What were His purposes for disciplining them through attacks, captivities, animosity and suffering?**

 **The clear teaching from God’s Self-revelation, the Bible, is that God chose Israel to be a particular people, favored by His presence, His guidance, His provision and His everlasting love. This truth must constitute the backdrop to viewing all the treatment of the Jews by God; He disciplines those who are His own for His glory and their good. In Exodus Israel is delivered out of slavery by the direct intervention of God (God Himself slew the firstborn of Egypt, passing over the homes of the Israelites who painted the lintel and posts of their houses with sacrificial blood) [Ex. 10:1-13, esp. vs.12].**

 **The question must be asked, “Why have the Jews been so persecuted, and, particularly, why have they suffered at the hands of those claiming to be Christians?” The answer to that question is that there has been a prejudice against the Jews because they alone have been charged as responsible for the death of Christ. They were labeled, “Christ killers.”**

 **We will prove that in affixing blame for the death of Christ a more universal viewpoint must be taken. This brings us then to the question, “Who is responsible for the death of Christ?”**

**OUTLINE:**

**I / Why did Christ have to die? Was He a martyr? –NO--, Self-sacrifice, ability to call down angels, submission to the Father’s will, fulfilment of prophecy, achievement of salvation, etc.**

**II / What role did God the Father play? – Foreordained from the foundation of the world – Permitted the complicity of evil men – Voluntary offering of His Son**

**III / What was Jesus response to those who crucified Him? – “Father, forgive them, because they do not know what they are doing.” [Prayer answered.] Explain the animosity of the Jews, “Let His death be on us and our children.”/ These knew what they were doing.**

**IV / What was the response by many of the Jews to the preaching that Jesus is the resurrected Lord and Savior? – “Brothers, what should we do?”**

**About 3000 Jews trusted Christ to be their Savior, many of whom had demanded His death. [Acts 2:36-41]**

**V / What was the attitude of the apostles toward the Jews? – “Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer for Israel is that they may be saved. – I could wish myself accursed if that would allow their salvation.” [Romans 9:2-3] This statement was made even after some Jews from Antioch and Iconium came to Lystra and stirred up a mob to stone Paul leaving him for dead. [Acts14:19-20]**

**VI / Paul’s preaching to the Jews in spite of their attempts on his life show his concern for their salvation. – However, their final rejection sent Paul to the Gentiles. [Acts 13:44ff]**

**VII / Prophecy about the completed promises to Israel indicate they are the Chosen People. – The full, literal granting of the threefold promise to Abraham and his descendants remains to be achieved. [Genesis 12:1-3 & 17:7-8] (The Land not yet fully given!) God’s irrevocable promises are based upon His unending love for Israel. Isaiah 1:2-3 Listen heavens and pay attention, earth, For the Lord has spoken: “I have raised children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against Me. The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master’s feeding trough, but Israel does not know; My people do not understand.”**

**LISTING OF PERSECUTIONS AGAINST ISRAEL/JEWS:**

1. **The ‘nation’ of Israel was birthed, coming out of oppressive slavery in Egypt, with ‘Passover’ commemorating their rescue which followed the judgment expressed by the death of Egypt’s firstborn.**
2. **The harsh treatment of Israel by the Canaanite peoples was an expression of divine discipline for forsaking the ways of Yahweh and worshipping the gods of the peoples God had singled out for destruction, a destruction Israel was to execute, but refused to completely do.**
3. **The Assyrian and Babylonian captivities represent more severe divine disciplines against Israel for forsaking God’s laws, particularly forsaking those such as 1) favoring just treatment of the poor and oppressed and 2) for expressing trust in God to provide during the ‘Sabbath rest’ provided for the land.**
4. **When Haman, the enemy of the Jews, plotted for their total destruction, God thwarted his plan and preserved the Jews in the Persian Empire, after the Babylonian captivity. (EVIL PLOT = Ester 3:12ff / On April 17 Haman called in the king’s secretaries and dictated letters to the princes, the governors of the respective provinces, and the local officials of each province in their own scripts and languages. These letters were signed in the name of King Xerxes, sealed with his ring, and sent by messengers into all the provinces of the empire. The letters decreed that all Jews – young and old, including women and children – must be killed, slaughtered, and annihilated on a single day. This was scheduled to happen nearly a year later on March 7. The property of the Jews was to be given to those who killed them.**

**GOD’S INTERVENTION = Ester 8:9ff / So on June 25 the king’s secretaries were summoned. As Mordecai dictated, they wrote a decree to the Jews and to the princes, governors, and local officials of all the 127 provinces stretching from India to Ethiopia. The decree was written in the scripts and languages of all the peoples of the empire, including the Jews. Mordecai wrote in the name of King Xerxes and sealed the message with the king’s signet ring. He sent the letters by swift messengers, who rode horses especially bred for the king’s service.**

 **The king’s decree gave the Jews in every city authority to unite to defend their lives. They were allowed to kill, slaughter, and annihilate anyone of any nationality or province who might attack them or their children or wives, and to take the property of their enemies.)**

1. **Following the breakup of Alexander’s Greek Empire, the Seleucid ruler, Antiochus Epiphanies, imposed harsh measures against the Jews in his attempt to “Hellenize” the world. (Jews were forbidden: 1] to teach from or possess Torah, 2] they had their temple desecrated in Jerusalem, and 3] they were forced to eat unclean animals / all on pain of death.)**
2. **{Respite} When Julius Caesar came to power as Emperor of Rome, he owed his success in great part to the Jews who helped him by sending 3000 well-trained troops from Jerusalem to lift the siege of Alexandria, Egypt. Then, by supplying millions in gold to pay off his debts, thereby secured Caesar’s sole right to rule. As a result, Jews: 1] were given special treatment throughout the Empire, 2] were made exempt from many taxes and 3] were allowed to worship in their biblically prescribed way without having to worship the emperor as a god. This favorable status continued in part even after the assignation of Julius Caesar. Tragically, Marc Antony, who followed Caesar, gave power to Herod, who represented the antithesis of Jewish principles and virtues.**
3. **For further examples of harsh treatment of Jews subsequent to the birth of Christ, See the essay titled, “PRESERVATION OF THE JEWS AS PROOF OF THE BIBLE AS GOD’S WORD”**

**VIII / “Harsh” statements about the hardheartedness of the Jews were meant to draw their attention to the promised Messiah. – Jews were described in most of the Old Testament as rebels and unfaithful to God, the God Who nevertheless made provision for them to be blessed when they repented and then began to properly worship Him. In the New Testament, the Jews were described as rejecting their Messiah, Jesus, for the most part, however, all of the apostles of Jesus (Who was Himself a Jew) were Jewish as well as the thousands of people who were the first to become Christians. The Apostle to the Gentiles, Paul, expresses his heartfelt love for his kinsmen the Jews, wishing, if it were possible, that he himself could become accursed so that his fellow Jews could be saved.**

 **God is holy. God cannot tolerate sin. Sin is an offense to God’s eternal holiness, especially whenever people try to secure their own salvation by their own merits.**

 **God loves sinners. God does not have conflict within his perfect nature, so, there was never any disharmony between God’s wrath and his love. There was never any tension between the Father’s justice and the Son’s self-giving love. Therefore, the Holy Judge stepped into humanity to bear the penalty for the sin of all mankind in his own Person, viz. Jesus Christ. Both God the Father and God the Son have always been in complete harmony with respect to how the salvation of sinful mankind must be accomplished.**

 **“Jesus Christ is said to be the ‘propitiation’ for our sins and our ‘advocate’ with the Father (1 Jn. 2:2, AV), which at first sight suggests that he died to placate God’s anger and is now pleading with him in order to persuade him to forgive us. But other parts of Scripture forbid us to interpret the language of propitiation and advocacy in that way… The whole notion of a compassionate Christ inducing a reluctant God to take action on our behalf founders on the fact of God’s love. There was no *Umstimmung* in God, no change of mind or heart secured by Christ. On the contrary, the saving initiative originated in him. It was ‘because of the tender mercy of our God’ (Lk. 1:78) that Christ came, ‘because of his great love for us’, because of ‘the grace of God that brings salvation’ (Tit. 2:11).**

 **As for the other formulation (that God punished Jesus for our sins), it is true that the sins of Israel were transferred to the scapegoat, that ‘the Lord laid on him’, his suffering servant, all our iniquity (Is. 53:6), that ‘it was the Lord’s will to crush him’ (Is.53:10), and that Jesus applied to himself Zechariah’s prophecy that God would ‘strike the shepherd’. It is also true that in the New Testament God is said to have ‘sent’ his Son to atone for our sins (1 Jn. 4:9-10), ‘delivered him up’ for us, ‘presented him as a sacrifice of atonement’ (Rom. 3:25), ‘condemned sin’ in his flesh (Rom. 8:3), and ‘make him…to be sin for us’ (2cor. 5:21). These are striking statements. But we have no liberty to interpret them in such a way as to imply either that God compelled Jesus to do what he was unwilling to do himself, or that Jesus was an unwilling victim of God’s harsh justice. Jesus Christ did indeed bear the penalty of our sins, but God was active in and through Christ doing it, and Christ was freely playing his part (*e.g.* Heb. 10:5-10).**

 **We must not, then, speak of God punishing Jesus or of Jesus persuading God, for to do so is to set them over against each other as if they acted independently of each other or were even in conflict with each other. We must never make Christ the object of God’s punishment or God the object of Christ’s persuasion, for both God and Christ were subjects not objects, taking the initiative together to save sinners. Whatever happened on the cross in terms of ‘God-forsakenness’ was voluntarily accepted by both in the same holy love which made atonement necessary.” [Stott, THE CROSS OF CHRIST, pp.150-151]**

 **Returning to the theme of that most personal event of God the Son voluntarily making Himself the ‘sacrificial Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world’, as Stott says, that God “…in giving his Son was giving himself. This being so, it is the Judge himself who in holy love assumed the role of innocent victim, for in and through the person of his Son he himself bore the penalty which he himself inflicted. As Dale put it, ‘the mysterious unity of the Father and the Son rendered it possible for God at once to endure and to inflict penal suffering’. There is neither harsh injustice nor unprincipled love nor Christological heresy in that; there is only unfathomable mercy. For in order to save us in such a way as to satisfy himself, God through Christ substituted himself for us. Divine love triumphed over divine wrath by divine self-sacrifice. The cross was an act simultaneously of punishment and amnesty, severity and grace, justice and mercy.**

 **Seen thus, the objections to a substitutionary atonement evaporate. There is nothing even remotely immoral here, since the substitute for the law-breakers is none other than the divine Lawmaker himself. There is no mechanical transaction either, since the self-sacrifice of love is the most personal of all actions. And what is achieved through the cross is no merely external change of legal status, since those who see God’s love there, and are united to Christ by his Spirit, become radically transformed in outlook and character.” [Stott, THE CROSS OF CHRIST, p.159]**