

It Was Not Lawful for the Jews to Put Christ to Death

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It Was Not Lawful for the Jews to Put Christ to Death (Jn. 18:31).

It is important to clarify that neither the Jews nor the Romans were responsible for Christ's death. Instead, by Christ's own words it was Satan,

Jesus answered (Pilate), 'You could have no power at all against me unless it had been given you from above. Therefore the one who delivered me to you (Satan; Jn. 13:26-27 cf. Mt. 26:48; Mk. 14:44; Lk. 22:47-48) has the greater sin' (Jn. 19:11; Ed. notes in parentheses; NKJV used throughout unless otherwise noted).

Christ confirmed that neither the Jewish religious leaders nor the Romans knew what they were doing because they were deceived by Satan,

Then Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for **they do not know what they do,**' And they divided his garments and cast lots (Lk. 23:34; cf. Ac. 3:17; Rev. 12:9; emphasis added).

As the Jewish religious leaders did not want to take direct responsibility for killing Christ, they schemed and manipulated events to the point where the Romans would carry out the execution. It was a political maneuver that allowed the Jewish leaders to achieve their two main objectives. Their first goal was to have Christ killed, and the second was to maintain their position within the Jewish community, untainted,

Therefore many from the crowd, when they heard this saying said, 'Truly this is the Prophet (referring to Christ).'⁴¹ Others said, 'This is the Christ (Messiah),' but some said, 'Will the Christ come out of Galilee?' (Jn. 7:40-41; Ed. notes in parentheses).

So there was a division among the people because of him (Christ).⁴⁴ Now some of them (Jewish religious leaders) wanted to take him, **but no one laid hands on him** (Jn. 7:43-44; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

These Jewish leaders viewed their own followers as being ignorant of God's word, and this suited their purpose because they could stir up the population to demand Christ's death, even though he was innocent of any capital offense,

But this crowd (of average Jews) that does not know the law is accursed (Jn. 7:49; Ed. notes in parentheses).

For he (Pilate) knew that the chief priest had handed him (Christ) over because of envy (see study: Envy and Jealousy).¹¹ But **the chief priests stirred up the crowd, so that he should rather release Barabbas to them** (Mk. 15:10-11; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

It is no different today because leaders in religious communities often abuse their power by keeping their followers in ignorance over important issues and truths. This enables them to manipulate those who are under their authority (see study: How to Identify the Body of Christ Today).

With this background, the so-called contradictions regarding whether it was lawful for the Jews to kill Christ will be examined. Central to this issue was the method these leaders devised to accomplish Christ's death. The main accusations were aimed at convincing the Roman authorities that Christ was guilty of sedition and treason,

For many bore false witness against him (Christ), but their testimony did not agree (was not consistent).⁵⁷ And some rose up and bore false witness against him, saying,⁵⁸ **We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple that is made with hands** (i.e. sedition), and within three days I will build another made without hands (Mk. 14:56-58; cf. Mt. 26:59-61; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

From then on Pilate sought to release him (Christ), but the Jews cried out, saying, 'If you let this man go, you are not Caesar's friend. **Whoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar** (i.e. treason) (Jn. 19:12; Ed. note in parenthesis; emphasis added).

But they cried out, 'Away with him (Christ)! Crucify him!' Pilate said to them, 'Shall I crucify your king?' **The chief priests answered, 'We have no king but Caesar!'** (Jn. 19:15; Ed. note in parenthesis; emphasis added).

By convincing the Roman leadership that Christ was guilty of treason, it was no longer a religious matter that could be dealt with by the Jewish authorities (cf. Jn. 8:59; 10:31, Ac. 7:59). Instead, it became a civil matter over which the Jewish leaders had no authority. This is why they made the following statement, which confirmed that Christ's death would become Rome's responsibility,

Then Pilate said to them (Jewish leaders), 'You take him and judge him according to your law.' Therefore (because of Pilate's instruction) the Jews said to him, **'It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death'** (Jn. 18:31; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

According to a quote from the Catholic Encyclopedia, the Romans did not allow the Sanhedrin to carry out executions for capital offenses without the authority of Rome's representative in Jerusalem.

Capital sentences pronounced by the Sanhedrin needed confirmation from the Roman officer before they could be carried into execution. Such was the state of things during the public life of Christ and the following thirty years (Catholic Encyclopedia (1912); Charles Souvay; see also: www.newadvent.org/cathen/13444a.htm).

As the Jewish religious leaders were able to stone Stephen (Ac. 7:59), over what they deemed as "blasphemy," it confirms that matters which were strictly "religious" could be administered without approval from a Roman officer. However, the Jewish leaders accused Christ of treason against Caesar and therefore it became a civil matter that placed the responsibility upon Pilate.

The final scripture, used by some to claim that God's word is contradictory, does not say that the Jewish authorities could put Christ to death. Instead, it simply states that Christ

was worthy of death, based on their interpretation of Christ's teachings,

The Jews answered him (Pilate), 'We have a law, and according to our law he (Christ) ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God (Jn. 19:7; Ed. notes in parentheses).

Therefore, upon a closer examination of historical facts and scripture, it is clear the Jewish leadership had limited authority to stone someone who, in their opinion, committed blasphemy. However in Christ's case, they accused him of treason against Caesar, which was a civil action. In this situation, they had no authority to execute him. Instead, it became the responsibility of Rome's representative, Pilate. When the Jewish leaders accused Christ of blasphemy (cf. Jn. 19:7), it was only their opinion and not a statement claiming they had unfettered authority to execute him. So there is no contradiction between John 18:31 and 19:7.

This document is the collaborative work of individuals who believe God's truth should be given freely (Mt. 10:8; 1Cor. 2:12; 2Cor.11:7; Rom. 10:14-21) and the message of the one true God should be made available to all nations (Mt. 24:14) as a prerequisite to the return of Jesus Christ as King of kings (Mt. 17:10; 19:17; Mk. 9:11; Lk. 1:17; Rev. 19:11-16).

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