Who Really Killed Jesus?
By Steve Smithbauer

[Some time ago,] Mel Gibson's movie, *The Passion of the Christ*, began playing in theaters across the nation. Since the film has met with some intense controversy, it is perhaps appropriate to address some of the criticisms leveled against it. By no means is this an endorsement or a condemnation of the movie. This writer has not yet seen *The Passion*, but from previews, it appears to be a stunning visual account of the last twelve hours of the life of Jesus. Then too, if the reviews are correct, we expect there to be some scriptural inaccuracies contained in the story itself. This would not be completely unexpected since it is a manmade work of art, and directors and writers often take some liberties with their scripts, citing poetic license or artistic expression as their reasons for doing so.

The title of the film suggests the content as well. From its Latin roots, the word "passion" originally meant "pain and suffering." As is common with word usage, the meaning has changed somewhat over the passing centuries to also include the **com**passion or pity and love Jesus has for the human race.

Many in the media have expressed concern with *The Passion's* graphic, violent nature. Where were these people when *The Terminator, Silence of the Lambs, The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, etc. were released? Incidentally, there does not seem to be as much public outcry against modern video games either. Of course, if the film is to be visually accurate at all, it of necessity must be violent and bloody! The events leading up to the cross and the crucifixion itself are so gruesome as to be extremely disturbing. Are modern people so ignorant that they would think the ancient method of crucifixion to be any less than extreme? For this reason, it would not be appropriate for younger children to view *The Passion*, in this writer's opinion.

Then the accusation of the film being anti-Semitic has arisen. The Jews were descendants of Shem, Noah's son, and are called Shem-ites or Semites, thus the term. The complaint is that Mr. Gibson chose to portray the Jewish characters in his film in a bad light, thus causing people to be needlessly angered at the race of Jews living today. First of all, simply telling history as it has occurred is not promoting hatred toward any race. When Mel Gibson starred in *Braveheart*, we can recall no great criticism that he was promoting "anti-English" sentiments, but that movie did not portray King Edward the "Long Shanks," or his armies, in a favorable way. Did the movie *Pearl Harbor* promote hatred for the Japanese? It would not seem to be the filmmaker's intent. Such movies are made for a variety of reasons -- to tell a history, entertain an audience, to make a profit, etc. Mr. Gibson's motives seem to be based on his strong beliefs, especially since he reportedly fronted much of the expense for the movie himself.

Secondly, true Christians are not going to be angered or incited to hate a group of people who crucified their Savior nearly two thousand years ago. Quite the contrary, we are profoundly thankful for Jesus' sacrifice, realizing it was a part of God's plan for redemption prophesied centuries before it occurred, and the Jews living today did not have a part in plotting his death. The Scriptures remind us, "The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son" (Ezekiel 18:20).

Anchor Diane Sawyer interviewed Mr. Gibson…on television and asked, "Who really killed Jesus?" At first, this may incite outrage from some. How dare someone ask such a question? Are

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we so scripturally illiterate that we honestly do not know, or is the question designed to invoke a response? Whatever the intent of Ms. Sawyer, this is an honest, legitimate question and one the Bible does answer in detail.

First, in the political sense, The JEWS engineered the plot against Jesus.

Not all Jews from every time period, but the religious leaders of the Jews in Jesus' day were responsible for plotting the death of their own Messiah. Peter told these Jews on Pentecost, "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain" (Acts 2:23). Determinate means that they had made up their minds they were going to get rid of him no matter what. This was the plan from early on (John 11:47-54):

Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a council, and said, What do we? for this man doeth many miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him: and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation. And one of them, named Caiaphas, being the high priest that same year, said unto them, Ye know nothing at all, Nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not. And this spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation; And not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad. Then from that day forth they took counsel together for to put him to death.

They used another nation to accomplish this task, but there can be no doubt that the Jews are at least in part responsible for Jesus' death (Acts 10:38-39):

*How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; **whom they slew and hanged on a tree***:

They even told Pilate, "His blood be on us, and on our children" (Matthew 27:25). Later, they were adamant about their innocence in the matter as they angrily threatened Peter and the rest of the apostles. "Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us." Still, it cannot be denied that the Jews were responsible for the death of Jesus on the Cross.

In the strictest physical sense, The ROMANS carried out the actual crucifixion.

These are the "wicked hands" of Acts 2:23. At this time, the Jews no longer had the power to legally administer capital punishment to their criminals. This power resided in Rome and was administered through the procurator Pontius Pilate, Rome's representative. "Then said Pilate unto them, Take ye him, and judge him according to your law. The Jews therefore said unto him, It is not lawful for us to put any man to death" (John 18:31).

It is true that the Jews did on occasion break this law of Rome. They stoned Stephen to death (Acts 7:59). Possibly because Jesus was "higher profile," they did not opt for this with him, but rather sought to have him disposed of "legally." We cannot know for sure, but it seems to make sense. Jesus was well known throughout Palestine, but undoubtedly word had traveled beyond the confines of Israel. So, it was that the Roman soldiers actually crucified Jesus. "Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments, and made four parts, to every soldier a part" (John 19:23).

In the spiritual sense, EVERY ONE OF US killed Jesus by our sins.

Mel Gibson's answer to Diane Sawyer in the interview was, "We all killed Jesus." This is certainly true. Jesus came to die for our sins, of which we are all guilty (Romans 3:23). Had we not sinned, Jesus' death on the cross would have been unnecessary. In John 3:16-17 we read:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

Jesus himself stated, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). This, however, could only happen as a result of his sacrifice for our sins. Romans 6:23 tells us, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life..." It was Jesus' mission then to "Taste death for every man" (Hebrews 2:9). So we all bear some responsibility for the Savior's death, and yet...

In the most absolute sense, however, NO ONE killed Jesus, but he gave himself.

John 19:10-11 reads:

Then saith Pilate unto him, Speakest thou not unto me? knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee? Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin.

Jesus humbly submitted to death on the cross. Nobody took him by force. Think about it for a moment. This is the Son of God, co-existent, co-eternal with the Father and the Holy Spirit from everlasting to everlasting! How could mere mortal men take him by force and hold him against his will? Answer: They could not. Why then did it happen? It is because Jesus willingly went to the cross of his own accord to do the Father's will and to fulfill the scriptures. John 10:15-18 reads:

As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd. Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.

Jesus, out of love for mankind, gave his life a ransom for many. Instead of being swept away by the powers that be, Jesus patiently endured this trial in order to establish the church and make the way of salvation clear and plain. "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; **who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross,** despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:2).

We could also raise the observation that Jesus rose from the dead on the third day following his crucifixion. His resurrection makes placing the blame of his death a moot point anyway! "I am he that liveth, and was dead, and behold I am alive forevermore" (Revelation 1:18).

With all the controversy surrounding the film, it is, we believe, appropriate to address such questions as Ms. Sawyer's biblically. Jesus' death occurred by God's design to bring about the New Covenant, salvation, the church, etc. The Gospel did not promote anti-Semitism then, or now. In fact, large numbers of Jews and even the priests believed and obeyed the Gospel in the first century. "And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in

Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7). Estimates of the population in and around Jerusalem at this time are said to be about two hundred thousand (200,000) with as many as twenty thousand (20,000) being Christians! At one point, the number of Christians may have even ballooned up to as high as fifty thousand for this area. So, it was hardly an anti-Semitic message that was being delivered then, nor is it so today. Jesus was a Jew and so were his disciples! This is a fact that seems to escape the modern critics.

The sad situation today is that many will view the movie, *The Passion of the Christ*, and come away from the theater with tears streaming down their faces, but still lost in their sins. Please do not forget the sacrifice of the Son of God gives him the authority to make demands of us.

All power hath been given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. And lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world (Matthew 28:18-20).

Why not be obedient to this Gospel where: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:28-29)?