

Why Was Jesus Killed?

It's easy to say that Jesus died because God willed it. But that ignores the role that humans played in the tragedy. God did *not* will that—but used it anyway.

“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know—Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death” (Ac. 2:22-23).



Jesus was not crucified because He was a thief or a murderer. He was not killed because he was molesting children or stirring up insurrection against the Roman government. There was nothing at all in His track record to warrant the terrible fate that befell Him.

So why did He die? There were several factors that converged to put Him on that cross that day.

First, Jesus died because *the religious intellectuals of that day were shameless hypocrites*. The self-righteous posturing of the scribes and Pharisees cheapened God's law, turning Judaism into a tangled mess that burdened the lives of ordinary people. Jesus did not hesitate to call them out for their dishonesty (Matt. 23). They were determined to make Jesus pay for His interference.

Second, He was executed because *the rich and powerful felt threatened by His influence*. The priestly class in Jerusalem—

comprising the sect of the Sadducees—had long ago morphed into an aristocracy that maintained an iron grip on civic affairs. They were less concerned about religion than about preserving their cozy relationship with the Romans and the moneyed interests that profited off that arrangement. When Jesus drove the money changers and merchants out of the temple (Matt. 21:12-13), their little racket was threatened. So, He had to be dealt with.

Third, He went to the cross because *a mob was easily manipulated by those who knew how to pull their strings*. Many of these Passover worshippers had only a few days before welcomed Jesus into the city. Now they were screaming for His blood. Popular opinion is never more fickle than when it is exploited by schemers who know how to take advantage of a mob's ignorance and emotions.

Finally, Jesus was killed because *a political ruler was more interested in self-preservation than justice*. Pilate knew perfectly well that Jesus was not deserving of death. But with hundreds of rabid Jews screaming “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!” he also knew that a riot would spell the end of his public career. So, like many politicians before and after him, he did the politically expedient thing and yielded to the tide of hate that was squeezing him.

Weeks later, Peter said that Jesus' death came about “by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God” (Ac. 2:23; 4:28). Yes, God foreordained the *outcome*; but He did not foreordain the *sins* that led to that outcome. As with Pharaoh prior to the Exodus, God used the rebellion of humans to achieve a victory that overwhelmed the very thing they were trying to accomplish. Jesus' enemies wanted Him dead, finished, destroyed. God gave them what they wanted—then used their crime to set up the greatest miracle of all. In Jesus' death and resurrection, God achieved His ultimate victory over Satan and death. In the end, God *always* wins.

The murder of Jesus was not a carefully choreographed ballet with a happy ending. It was a very real and brutal battle between the cosmic forces of good and evil. When we see the powers of darkness loom large and begin to overwhelm everything that is decent, we have cause to be frightened. But we must remember that circumstances are never out of God's control. Somehow, some way, someday, *God will win*. If He can use the murder of a poor carpenter to save the world, He can save me. Believe it!

— David King