

Why Was Jesus Crucified and Not Stoned to Death?

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Passion Week begins on Palm Sunday with Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, fulfilling the five-hundred-year-old prophecy of Zechariah (9:9). This last week of Jesus' earthly ministry is called Passion Week because of how passionately Jesus Christ expressed His love for you and me by willingly going through a week of trial and suffering.

All four of the Gospels provide vivid details of this week's events. Nearly 50% of the Gospel of John is about the last week of Jesus' life, nearly 30% of the Gospel of Mark is about the last week of Jesus' life, nearly 25% of the Gospel of Matthew is about the last week of Jesus' life, and nearly 25% of the Gospel of Luke is about the last week of Jesus' life.

Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem also fulfills part of Daniel's seventy weeks prophecy. Daniel 9:24 explains there were six purposes for this prophecy: (1) to finish the transgression, (2) to make an end of sin, (3) to make atonement for iniquity, (4) to bring in everlasting righteousness, (5) to seal up vision and prophecy, and (6) to anoint the Holy of Holies.

As far as the timing of these seventy weeks, verses 25-27 of Daniel 9 explain there will be seven 'sevens' and sixty-two 'sevens' and one final 'seven', for a total of 490 years. The prophecy divides the 490 years into three smaller units: one of 49 years, one of 434 years, and one of 7 years. Daniel's prophetic timeline begins when a decree was issued to rebuild Jerusalem. That was the first unit of 49 years (seven 'sevens'). Nehemiah 2:1-8 explains the second set of sevens begins from the date the decree to rebuild Jerusalem was issued by Artaxerxes of Persia to the time the Messiah enters Jerusalem, which means Palm Sunday completes that sixty-two 'weeks' timeline. The last seven years of Daniel's seventy weeks will be the coming Tribulation.

With the backdrop of the beginning of Passion Week explained, let's look at the question: Why was Jesus crucified and not stoned to death? The Jewish form of capital punishment was to take the guilty party outside of the city walls and stone them to death. This is what happened to Stephen in Acts 7. But that was not how Jesus was killed; He was crucified. Why? As Passion Week progressed and the tension from the religious leaders increased, a plot was birthed to have Jesus charged and found guilty of blasphemy. It was vital to the religious leaders' plan to have a guilty verdict on the charge of blasphemy. Why? Because a guilty verdict would mean the death penalty. The religious leaders needed Jesus to be crucified, not stoned to death, because Deuteronomy 21:22-23 states anyone who is hung on a tree is cursed by God.

The Torah clearly reveals to be hung on a tree (crucified) would not only bring death, but it would also bring God's curse. If Jesus was cursed by God, then his ministry would be over. This would eliminate the threat the religious leaders felt from Jesus' ministry and His following. Had He been put to death via the Jewish way, by stoning, He could have been received as a martyr and His ministry could have grown. Placing God's curse on Jesus was vital to the religious

leaders' plan. This meant they had to get the Romans to find Jesus guilty of a capital offense because the Romans were the only ones allowed to crucify criminals.

Jesus was sent to Pontius Pilate who was the Roman governor of Judea at the time. The religious leaders sent Jesus to the Roman authority because they claimed Jesus' "kingdom" was a threat and a crime against Rome. Luke 23:22 explains Pilate found "no grounds for the death penalty." In Matthew 27:19, Pilate's wife sent him a message warning him not to have anything to do with Jesus.

The pressure to find an innocent man guilty was placed on Pilate. Hoping to put an end to this charge, the Roman governor confronted Jesus directly, asking Him if He was a king of the Jews (John 18). Jesus confirmed that He is a king but His "kingdom is not of this world." In a last-ditch effort to get out of this decision, Pilate went before the crowd asking which criminal they would like him to release: Jesus or Barabbas. As the crowd shouted 'crucify Him,' meaning Jesus, Pilate gave in to the pressure and found Jesus guilty of a crime against Rome and ordered him flogged and crucified.

The Jewish leaders' plan of using Scripture (Deuteronomy 21) to place God's curse on Jesus would have been successful if it were not for Sunday morning and His rising from the grave! Jesus was not cursed by God; He is God. He resurrected from the dead. He became the first fruit of resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:23), giving you and me the hope of an eternal glorious future!

In celebrating the Holy Week, it is easy to point a finger at the Jewish leaders or the Romans for killing Jesus. But, before you point a finger of guilt at the Jews or the Romans, let me remind you of the words found in Acts 4:27. *"For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel."* This verse says we all are guilty of Jesus' innocent blood — Herod, Pilate, Jews, Gentiles, you, and me — are the ones responsible for Jesus' death on the cross.

However, because of Christ's passion and love for us, we can have hope as we wait for our blessed hope and the opportunity to worship the Lord for eternity!