

Crucify Him!

Vincent Cheung

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PO Box 15662, Boston, MA 02215, USA

<http://www.vincentcheung.com>

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1 Thessalonians 2:14-16

For you, brothers, became imitators of God's churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own countrymen the same things those churches suffered from the Jews, who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out. They displease God and are hostile to all men in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. In this way they always heap up their sins to the limit. The wrath of God has come upon them at last.

The New Testament is clear in teaching that the Jews murdered Jesus. It states this explicitly and repeatedly, in different settings, and in various ways. It states that the Jews intended to kill Jesus, that they plotted to kill Jesus, that they tried to kill Jesus, that they would kill Jesus, and that they did kill Jesus. Here Paul writes, "the Jews...killed the Lord Jesus" (v. 15) – a direct, concise, and explicit statement that the Jews murdered Jesus. This fact receives repeated emphasis in the preaching of the apostles, whether they are addressing Jews, or whether they are addressing Gentiles, as in this letter to the Thessalonians.

This testimony so pervades Scripture that it is impervious to the efforts of those who would revise or obscure history. In fact, the biblical passages stating that the Jews murdered Jesus are so numerous that a full exposition of them could make up a whole book. Thus we shall cite only a limited number of passages with brief comments, and in the process we will address some common attempts at neutralizing this scriptural record.

First, many passages establish the Jews' intention and a number of actual attempts to murder Jesus. The case to convict the Jews for the murder of Jesus does not require these passages that show their long-held intention to commit murder, but it contributes to the overall picture. Although they do not refer to the crucifixion, which came later, morally speaking the intention to murder and the attempt at murder are equal to actual murder (Matthew 6:21-22). A person who intends to commit murder has already performed it in the moral sense, so that even if he transgresses no law of the state, he has still committed murder in his heart and in the sight of God. This is especially true if he makes actual attempts at committing murder, even if he fails at it. From a moral perspective, his failure does not make him less guilty.

In addition, once it is established that there has been a persistent intention to murder and multiple attempts at carrying it out, then when the victim is killed by his active and necessary involvement, without which the murder could not have happened, it cannot be said that he is in any way free from blame, as if he has been reluctant or that his contribution was unnecessary or even accidental.

Then he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." So he stretched it out and it was completely restored, just as sound as the other. But the Pharisees went out and *plotted how they might kill Jesus*. (Matthew 12:13-14).

Then the chief priests and the elders of the people assembled in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, and *they plotted to arrest Jesus in some sly way and kill him*. (Matthew 26:3-4)

The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus *so that they could put him to death*. (Matthew 26:59)

Early in the morning, all the chief priests and the elders of the people came to the decision *to put Jesus to death*. (Matthew 27:1)

The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and *began looking for a way to kill him*, for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching. (Mark 11:18)

Now the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were only two days away, and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were looking for some sly way *to arrest Jesus and kill him*. (Mark 14:1)

The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for evidence against Jesus *so that they could put him to death*, but they did not find any. Many testified falsely against him, but their statements did not agree. (Mark 14:55-56)

All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, *in order to throw him down the cliff*. But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way. (Luke 4:28-30)

Every day he was teaching at the temple. But the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the leaders among the people were *trying to kill him*. (Luke 19:47)

Jesus said to them, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working." For this reason *the Jews tried all the harder to kill him*. (John 5:17-18)

Jesus answered, "...Has not Moses given you the law? Yet not one of you keeps the law. *Why are you trying to kill me?*" ...At that point

some of the people of Jerusalem began to ask, "Isn't this the man *they are trying to kill?*" (John 7:16, 19, 25)

"Abraham is our father," they answered. "If you were Abraham's children," said Jesus, "then you would do the things Abraham did. As it is, *you are determined to kill me*, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things. You are doing the things your own father does." You belong to your father, the devil, and *you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer* from the beginning, not holding to the truth. (John 8:39-41, 44)

"I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!" At this, *they picked up stones to stone him*, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds. (John 8:58-59)

My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one." *Again the Jews picked up stones to stone him.* (John 10:29-31)

"But Rabbi," they said, "a short while ago *the Jews tried to stone you*, and yet you are going back there?" (John 11:8)

So from that day on *they plotted to take his life.* (John 11:53)

Meanwhile a large crowd of Jews found out that Jesus was there and came, not only because of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. *So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well*, for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and putting their faith in him. (John 12:9-11)

Luke 4:28-30 shows that the Jews had tried to kill Jesus since the inception of his ministry. There they were about to throw him down a cliff. The only reason that the murder did not occur was because Jesus escaped from them. Then, the other passages show that the Jews wanted to kill him throughout his ministry, and even made multiple attempts at it. More than once they picked up rocks to stone him – they had the rocks in their hands, ready to throw them at him to murder him.

Contrary to popular assumption, some of the passages indicate that the intention to murder and the attempts at murder were not limited to the religious leaders, but many Jews who were not religious leaders wanted and attempted to kill Jesus, as illustrated in the incident in Nazareth recorded in Luke 4, where murderous intent and action are attributed to "all the people in the synagogue." The tendency to restrict responsibility for the murder of Jesus to the religious leaders cannot stand up to scrutiny. Rather, the Jews in general were guilty for the murder of Jesus. This will become even more obvious when we examine the record of the trial.

Then, John 12:9-11 shows that the Jews wanted to kill *both* Jesus and Lazarus, since Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead, so that Lazarus became a living testimony to the Lord's ministry of divine power. The Jews acknowledged that Jesus performed genuine miracles, even "many miraculous signs" (John 11:47), that he was not a mere trickster or a magician. This is a significant point against the claim that the Jews acted out of ignorance. In what sense were they ignorant? What was the nature of this ignorance, and did it in any way reduce their guilt in the murder of Jesus? We will explore this question further in a moment. For now, the fact that they wanted to kill Lazarus also brings up an often neglected issue, namely, that the Jews did not murder Jesus only, but they also persecuted and murdered many, many, many of his followers, or Christians. We will also pursue this further in what follows.

In any case, now we have a reliable picture of the Jews as murderers that is not based on some isolated incidents or passages, but it is the pervasive testimony of Scripture, in fact, in both the Old and New Testaments, for the Jews were also fond of murdering the prophets that God sent to them. So Jesus says in John 8:44 that the Jews belonged to their father, the devil, that they wanted to carry out the devil's desires, and the devil was "a murderer from the beginning." Thus he means that the Jews were murderers like the devil. Murder was in their nature. They had a strong disposition to kill people, innocent and righteous people.

Coming now to the events leading up to the crucifixion, we will cite from Luke's record, since it includes more details that are relevant to our topic, but we will also draw from the others.

Then the whole assembly rose and led him off to Pilate. And they began to accuse him, saying, "We have found this man subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Christ, a king."

So Pilate asked Jesus, "Are you the king of the Jews?"

"Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied.

Then Pilate announced to the chief priests and the crowd, "I find no basis for a charge against this man."

But they insisted, "He stirs up the people all over Judea by his teaching. He started in Galilee and has come all the way here."

On hearing this, Pilate asked if the man was a Galilean. When he learned that Jesus was under Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time.

When Herod saw Jesus, he was greatly pleased, because for a long time he had been wanting to see him. From what he had heard about him, he

hoped to see him perform some miracle. He plied him with many questions, but Jesus gave him no answer. The chief priests and the teachers of the law were standing there, vehemently accusing him. Then Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked him. Dressing him in an elegant robe, they sent him back to Pilate. That day Herod and Pilate became friends – before this they had been enemies.

Pilate called together the chief priests, the rulers and the people, and said to them, "You brought me this man as one who was inciting the people to rebellion. I have examined him in your presence and have found no basis for your charges against him. Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us; as you can see, he has done nothing to deserve death. Therefore, I will punish him and then release him."

With one voice they cried out, "Away with this man! Release Barabbas to us!" (Barabbas had been thrown into prison for an insurrection in the city, and for murder.)

Wanting to release Jesus, Pilate appealed to them again. But they kept shouting, "Crucify him! Crucify him!"

For the third time he spoke to them: "Why? What crime has this man committed? I have found in him no grounds for the death penalty. Therefore I will have him punished and then release him."

But with loud shouts they insistently demanded that he be crucified, and their shouts prevailed. So Pilate decided to grant their demand. He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, the one they asked for, and surrendered Jesus to their will. (Luke 23:1-25)

Before Jesus was brought before Pilate, he was arrested by the authority of "the chief priests and the elders" (Matthew 26:47), and was tried before Caiaphas, the high priest (Matthew 26:57). There the Jews failed to present any evidence against him (Matthew 26:59-60), and when they brought false testimonies against him, their statements contradicted themselves (Mark 14:56, 59). Thus the Jews committed perjury, and the purpose was to find an excuse to murder Jesus.

They brought Jesus to Pilate, and after questioning him, he declared, "I find no basis for a charge against this man" (Luke 23:4). Then, he sent Jesus to Herod for examination, but finding no basis to charge Jesus with any crime, he sent him back (Luke 23:8-12, 15). And Pilate again said to the Jews, "I have examined him in your presence and have found no basis for your charges against him" (Luke 23:14). Thus both Herod and Pilate confronted the Jews with Jesus' innocence. Even Pilate's wife knew that Jesus was innocent, and made a special effort to tell her husband to leave him alone (Matthew

27:19). It was made clear to the Jews that to press for the death penalty would be to kill an innocent man. It would be murder.

Pilate realized that "it was out of envy that they had handed Jesus over to him" (Matthew 27:18). Again, it is partly true that the Jews murdered Jesus out of ignorance, and we will say more about this later. But we must deny that they murdered him out of ignorance in a sense that almost makes the whole thing seem accidental, since it was not accidental. In any case, Matthew 27:18 alone is enough to show us that they did not murder him only out of ignorance.

Seeing that Jesus was an innocent man and had committed no crime, and that the Jews had brought him there to be murdered because of their private and unjust agenda, Pilate told the Jews that he would release him (Luke 23:16). But the Jews refused "with one voice" (Luke 23:18). So, "wanting to release Jesus, Pilate appealed to them again" (Luke 23:20a). But the Jews kept shouting for Jesus to be murdered (Luke 23:20b). Pilate confronted them a third time, saying, "Why? What crime has this man committed? I have found in him no grounds for the death penalty. Therefore I will have him punished and then release him" (Luke 23:22). Over and over again, Pilate challenged the Jews with Jesus' innocence, and for them to provide evidence or testimony for his guilt, and finding none, over and over again, he declared that he would release Jesus. But the Jews insisted with "loud shouts" (Luke 23:23). They were determined to murder this innocent man. Later, this fact was featured in Peter's preaching, as he blamed the Jews for the death of Jesus: "You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go" (Acts 3:13).

All this time, Pilate was addressing "the chief priests, the rulers *and the people*" (Luke 23:13), and as noted, the Jews called for the murder of Jesus "with one voice" (Luke 23:18). This refutes the suggestion that only a small number of Jewish religious leaders were responsible for the murder of Jesus. It is true that "the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd" (Matthew 27:20), but *why* were they persuaded? Pilate repeatedly declared Jesus' innocence and his desire to release him, but the crowd was unaffected. What if someone argues that all the Nazis were persuaded by Hitler? Should they still be considered murderers? Excusing the Jews for the murder of Jesus because they were persuaded by the religious leaders would at the same time excuse the Nazis for the massacre of the Jews. In any case, the crowd was confronted with Jesus' innocence and with Pilate's decision to release him, but they insisted on murdering him. Pilate was "wanting to release Jesus" (Luke 23:20), but finally succumbed to "their will" (Luke 23:25). We should, of course, fault Pilate for it, but it remains that he did not agree with this. It was "their will" to murder Jesus. They knew what they were doing and they were eager to do it.

Pilate, knowing that they were sending an innocent man to his death, attempted to repudiate all responsibility to this murder: "When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. 'I am innocent of this man's blood,' he said. 'It is your responsibility!'" (Matthew 27:24). There was an extended struggle between Pilate and the Jews on the issue. The

Jews could have relented at any time, but their fierce insistence prevailed. And then, "*All the people* answered, 'Let his blood be on us and on our children!'" (Matthew 27:25). Again, the murder was not carried from start to finish by only a small number of religious leaders, but it involved "all the people" – numerous Jews from all levels of the populace. When Pilate warned that "this man's blood" would be their responsibility (Matthew 27:24), rather than shrinking back in fear to reconsider their action, they declared that the responsibility for murdering this man, "his blood," would fall on them and their descendents. As we will discuss later, this was predicted by Jesus himself and was soon fulfilled in history when thousands of Jews were slaughtered.

The Jews had a choice when Pilate confronted them with Jesus' innocence and made them assume responsibility for murdering him. And they had another choice when Pilate offered to release either Jesus, the innocent man, or Barabbas, "who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder" (Luke 23:25). They pressed for the murder of Jesus, and then decided that the murderer called Barabbas should be released. Murder had filled their hearts. At that point, they signed their murder pack with the devil, and sealed their own destruction, which would come not many years later. What if Hitler and an innocent Jew were both in prison, awaiting the death penalty, and someone, knowing who and what they were, chose to secure the release of Hitler over the release of the innocent Jew? What kind of monster would make any effort to defend the person who made this choice? And who would deny that this person had, by his choice, made himself complicit in the massacre of the Jews that was blamed on Hitler? The Jews made a choice before Pilate. They chose to murder and to release a murderer. Peter would later emphasize this in his preaching: "You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you" (Acts 3:14).

The active and direct role that the Jews played in the murder of Jesus was prominently featured in the preaching of the apostles since the beginning of their post-ascension ministry. Because the doctrine of the apostles defines the very meaning of the Christian faith, their interpretation of the events leading up to Jesus' crucifixion must be regarded as authoritative, even the final word on the attitude that any Christian must affirm on the matter.

"This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and *you*, with the help of wicked men, *put him to death by nailing him to the cross.*" (Acts 2:23)

The verse acknowledges that the crucifixion of Christ occurred by God's foreordination, and it also recognizes that the Jews had "the help of wicked men" in putting Jesus to death. These two factors are often used in diverting attention from the Jews for the murder of Jesus. But by mentioning them, this verse frustrates this diversion. This is because, despite the recognition of these two factors, the verse still makes the Jews the subject that performed the crucifixion, that is, it says, "*you*...put him to death by nailing him to the cross." Peter does not even say, "You pressed the Romans to crucify him," but rather, "You crucified him (by the Romans)." The crucifixion itself, and not just the

murder in general, was blamed on the Jews. So by acknowledging these factors that are often used as excuses for the Jews, the verse neutralizes these same excuses.

God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said, "'The Lord said to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.' Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this *Jesus, whom you crucified*, both Lord and Christ.'" (Acts 2:32-36)

The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. *You handed him over to be killed*, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. *You killed the author of life*, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. (Acts 3:13-15)

If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of *Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified* but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. (Acts 4:9-10)

Although Jesus was crucified by the hands of the Romans, Peter puts the blame on the Jews, saying, "Jesus, whom you crucified" (Acts 2:36). He repeats this a little later, saying, "Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified" (Acts 4:10). He does not say, "Jesus, whom the Romans crucified." No, he says "you" did it – the Jews crucified him. Acts 3:13 acknowledges that Jesus was handed over to Pilate, showing that Peter places the blame on the Jews not because he is unable to make intelligent distinctions, but he blames the Jews because they insisted on murdering Jesus when Pilate "had decided to let him go." Instead, they "asked that a murderer be released," that is, Barabbas. Therefore, Peter declares to the Jews, "You killed the author of life." The Jews killed Jesus. They murdered him.

"We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name," he said. "Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and *are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood.*"

Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than men! The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead – *whom you had killed* by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."

When they heard this, they were furious and *wanted to put them to death*. (Acts 5:28-33).

Acts 5:28 shows how the Jews understood the preaching of the apostles: "You...are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood." So, from both the explicit statements in the preaching of the apostles and the Jews' interpretation of the preaching of the apostles, there is no doubt that the Christians accused and blamed the Jews for the murder of Jesus. (If our preaching does not give people the impression that we make the Jews guilty of the blood of Jesus, are we preaching the same thing that the apostles preached?) And in Acts 5:30, "*Peter and the other apostles*" (the apostles were agreed on this issue) says it again: "Jesus...whom *you had killed* by hanging him on a tree." The apostles declared that the Jews were guilty not only for murdering Jesus, but also for the manner in which he was murdered, that is, by crucifixion. As if to help prove their accusation by example, now the Jews wanted to kill the apostles also (Acts 5:33).

Again, although the murder of Jesus receives special focus in a discussion like this, to kill his disciples, the Christians, when they have not committed any crime worthy of the death penalty constitutes murder just as much as when they killed Jesus. Once we open the discussion to how the Jews also murdered the disciples of Jesus, we are greeted with another avalanche of biblical passages citing their eagerness to murder Christians, only a small portion of which can be listed here, lest we be buried by them.

"You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet *your fathers* did not persecute? They *even killed those who predicted* the coming of the Righteous One. And now *you have betrayed and murdered him* – you who have received the law that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it." (Acts 7:51-53)

At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep. (Acts 7:57-60)

Stephen is speaking to the Jews. The content here is consistent with the preaching of the apostles. He states that the Jews before murdered those who predicted the one who was to come, and then the Jews now murdered him who had come as predicted. Again, the language directly accuses and blames the Jews: "Your fathers...killed...You have betrayed and murdered him." Notice that Stephen also grasps the distinction between "betrayed" and "murdered," but he still attributes the murder to the Jews. As we have seen from the Jews' behavior before Pilate, this thinking is thoroughly justified, since as the apostles point out, Pilate had decided to release Jesus. How did the Jews respond to this accusation of murder? They murdered Stephen as well (Acts 7:57-60).

Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ. After many days had gone by, *the Jews conspired to kill him*, but Saul learned of their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him. But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall. (Acts 9:22-25)

Saul, the apostle Paul, was converted and proceeded to preach the same Jesus whom the Jews murdered, and whom he had persecuted through entrapping, arresting, and murdering his disciples. He was able to prove "that Jesus is the Christ," in a manner that his enemies could not refute. So, "the Jews conspired to kill him."

Then some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowd over. They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead. But after the disciples had gathered around him, he got up and went back into the city. The next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe. (Acts 14:19-20)

Now in Antioch and Iconium, a different group of Jews tried to murder Paul. In fact, they apparently succeeded. Considering that they were eager and enraged, that they were very proficient and well-practiced at killing people by stoning them, that a person can survive only so many heavy rocks forcefully hurled at the head and various parts of the body with the intent to kill, and that they had a period of physical contact with him when they dragged his body out of the city (thus they had time to notice signs of life), there is a possibility that Paul had indeed died, and that God raised him from the dead.¹ But whether or not Paul had died, from the Jews' perspective, they had committed the murder, since they intended to kill him and then thought that they had succeeded.

The whole city was aroused, and the people came running from all directions. Seizing Paul, they dragged him from the temple, and immediately the gates were shut. While *they were trying to kill him*, news reached the commander of the Roman troops that the whole city of Jerusalem was in an uproar. He at once took some officers and soldiers and ran down to the crowd. When the rioters saw the commander and his soldiers, they stopped *beating Paul*. (Acts 21:30-32)

And when the blood of your martyr Stephen was shed, I stood there giving my approval and guarding the clothes of *those who were killing*

¹ Conrad Gempf writes, "If this were a resurrection, we would expect Luke to have made more of it" (*New Bible Commentary, 21st Century Edition*, Inter-Varsity Press, 2000, p. 1088). However, this is an argument from silence and carries no force. Thousands of miracles occur through the apostles, so that even "extraordinary miracles" receive only a mention that would apparently disappoint Gempf's expectation. (Acts 19:11-12). That is, if this were a resurrection, we would expect Gempf to make more of it, but we cannot be sure that Luke would have done the same.

him. Then the Lord said to me, "Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles." The crowd listened to Paul until he said this. Then they raised their voices and shouted, "Rid the earth of him! *He's not fit to live!*" (Acts 22:20-22)

The next morning the Jews formed a conspiracy and bound themselves with an oath not to eat or drink *until they had killed Paul*. More than *forty men were involved* in this plot. They went to the chief priests and elders and said, "We have taken a solemn oath not to eat anything *until we have killed Paul*. Now then, you and the Sanhedrin petition the commander to bring him before you on the pretext of wanting more accurate information about his case. *We are ready to kill him* before he gets here." (Acts 23:12-15)

He wrote a letter as follows: Claudius Lysias, To His Excellency, Governor Felix: Greetings. This man was seized by the Jews and *they were about to kill him*, but I came with my troops and rescued him, for I had learned that he is a Roman citizen. I wanted to know why they were accusing him, so I brought him to their Sanhedrin. I found that the accusation had to do with questions about their law, but *there was no charge against him that deserved death* or imprisonment. When I was informed of a plot to be carried out against the man, I sent him to you at once. I also ordered his accusers to present to you their case against him. (Acts 23:25-30)

Three days after arriving in the province, Festus went up from Caesarea to Jerusalem, where the chief priests and Jewish leaders appeared before him and presented the charges against Paul. They urgently requested Festus, as a favor to them, to have Paul transferred to Jerusalem, for *they were preparing an ambush to kill him* along the way. (Acts 25:1-3)

First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds. That is why *the Jews* seized me in the temple courts and *tried to kill me*. (Acts 26:20-21)

When discussing the murder of Jesus, the fact that the Jews also murdered many, many, many Christians is often ignored – the issue does not even come to mind. It is as if the lives of the early disciples were worthless and that slaughtering hundreds of them should not be considered murder, or even something important enough to discuss. But for some reason, Hitler's massacre of the Jews was so catastrophic and shocking that all races and all peoples from that time forward owe the Jews special charity and sensitivity.

In any case, mortality prevents us from taking the amount of time needed to display and comment on every passage that shows how the Jews were guilty of the murder of Jesus

and numerous Christians. So we will proceed to examine some of the popular objections against the New Testament's direct accusation and constant insistence that the Jews murdered Jesus.

Michael Brown deplores "the ocean of Jewish blood shed in Jesus' name,"² and writes, "What was it that provoked such 'Christian' hostility toward the Jews? Above all, it was the belief that the Jews killed Jesus."³ Since he thinks that this is the reason for hostility against the Jews, we would expect him to dismantle this belief in his attempt to neutralize the hostility. This is indeed what he does, as he continues, "But did the Jews really kill Jesus? What does the New Testament say?"⁴ Thus his arguments would aim to show that the Jews did not really kill Jesus, and that the New Testament would support this contention. The large list of biblical passages that we have examined render this impossible, but let us see what Brown has to say.

(1) The primary message of the New Testament is that God gave His Son for the salvation of the world, and therefore the death of Jesus was the explicit, foreordained will of God (see 1 Peter 1:18-20). True Christians, therefore, do not blame anyone for killing Jesus, rather, they thank God for sending His Son.⁵

Contrary to Brown, Acts 2:23 records that Peter first acknowledges the death of Christ as "God's set purpose," but then he still says to the Jews, "you...put him to death by nailing him to the cross." So the New Testament contradicts Brown's use of the idea that the death of Christ was foreordained. It was indeed foreordained, but the apostles still blamed the Jews. Moral blame has to do with whether a thought or action transgresses the commandment of God, and not whether the event is foreordained.

In fact, the whole Bible teaches that *all* thoughts and actions are foreordained. Even Hitler's massacre of the Jews was foreordained, but this says nothing about whether he was guilty of mass murder. The question of murder, of moral responsibility, has to do with whether he violated divine commandments relating to murder – divine foreordination does not generate or nullify moral responsibility. Whether an event or action is foreordained, the person is morally guilty of sin if he violates the divine commandments. This is so by definition.

This use of the doctrine of foreordination – that because the death of Christ was foreordained, the Jews did not really kill him – also contradicts the teaching of Jesus, including what he specifically said about the relation of divine foreordination and human responsibility when it comes to his betrayal and murder:

² Michael L. Brown, *What Do Jewish People Think about Jesus?* (Chosen Books, 2007), p. 196.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

"Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin! Such things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come!" (Matthew 18:7)

"The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born." Then Judas, the one who would betray him, said, "Surely not I, Rabbi?" Jesus answered, "Yes, it is you." (Matthew 26:24-25)

"The Son of Man will go as it has been decreed, but woe to that man who betrays him." (Luke 22:22)

As these verses demonstrate, the fact that an event or action is foreordained does not affect the moral responsibility of the person who brings about the event or performs the action. Foreordination has to do with the certainty that the event or action will occur, moral responsibility has to do with whether the event or action follows or violate the commandments of God, without regard to whether it has been foreordained.⁶

It is true that Christ was sent to die for the salvation of God's chosen ones, but again this does not affect the moral responsibility of those who murdered him. In fact, the mention of the divine decree (that Christ should die) and the purpose for the divine decree (for the salvation of the elect) does not even address the topic, which is whether the Jews killed Jesus. The divine decree guarantees that they would do it, and that the death would be for redemption explains the purpose of the divine decree, but these two things do not touch on whether the Jews killed Jesus. It is logically a related but distinguishable matter. To answer with the mention of the decree and its purpose is to employ a tactic of misdirection, that is, to appear to answer the question in a way that believers would not wish to deny, but in fact avoid the question altogether.

However, it is in fact worse than misdirection. Was Jesus actually *murdered* or not? Yes or no? Was he unjustly killed by the hand of some man or men? If so, then he was murdered. If he was murdered, then someone did it. And by exalting the sacrificial reason behind it when that is not the issue in question, Brown in fact trivializes the murder aspect of the incident. But to trivialize the murder of an innocent man just because he is so good that he would sacrifice himself is to punish this man for his goodness. What kind of monster would do such a thing?

He writes, "True Christians, therefore, do not blame anyone for killing Jesus, rather, they thank God for sending His Son."⁷ Again, this does not address the issue in question. Of

⁶ There is no apparent contradiction here, since moral responsibility never has anything to do with divine foreordination of an event, but only its relation to the divine commandments – that is, whether it obeys them or transgresses them. And that this obedience or transgression has been foreordained does not affect the person's responsibility, since relative to the commandment, obedience is still what it is, and transgression is still what it is.

⁷ Brown, *Jewish People*, p. 196.

course we should be thankful that God sent his Son, but our topic has to do with something else, and this answer is a mere smokescreen. It is another distraction that gives the appearance of a response, misdirecting our thoughts to something that seems related, but that does not in fact address the original question.

There is also an alarming implication in Brown's statement. The apostles explicitly and repeatedly blamed the Jews for the murder of Jesus, but Brown says that true Christians do not blame anyone. So by implication, Brown disowns the apostles and thinks that they could not be true Christians. And if they were not true Christians, then all the apostles were sent to hell when they died, and there is no salvation in their message, since their message blames the Jews for murder.

I am unsure if Brown wishes to commit his soul to this position, but then the dilemma remains: either he agrees with the apostles that the Jews murdered Jesus, or he renounces the apostles, and thus also Jesus Christ and the Christian faith. If the apostles were not true Christians, then what is a Christian? And on what basis does Brown propose this alternative Christianity as authentic? Contrary to Brown, I say that true Christians believe the biblical and apostolic testimony, which says that the Jews murdered Jesus, and after that pursued and murdered many of his disciples.

(2) Jesus Himself testified that no one took His life; He laid it down willingly.

This is how we know what love is: Jesus [the Messiah]⁸ laid down his life for us. (1 John 3:16)

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep....The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life – only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father. (John 10:11, 17-18)⁹

This is Brown's second response to the questions "But did the Jews really kill Jesus? What does the New Testament say?" Here he points out that Jesus himself testified to two things relating to his death: (1) No one took his life, and (2) He laid it down willingly. These two points are derived from and asserted as relevant to the topic under discussion on the basis of 1 John 3:16 and John 10:11, 17-18. And on the basis of this response, the answers to the two questions are presumably, "No, the Jews did not really kill Jesus" and "The New Testament says that the Jews did not really kill Jesus." This should be a fair summary of Brown's second argument.

⁸ Brown is the one who, for some reason, changes the word "Christ" to "the Messiah" here. He does this in other places as well, but not everywhere.

⁹ Brown, *Jewish People*, p. 197.

This is again a clear example of misdirection. In fact, to accuse Brown for misdirection is to do him a favor. This is because of the frightening implication that results when we pretend that there is no misdirection and simply turn the argument against itself, as I will now demonstrate.

Brown depends on the idea that Jesus laid down his own life to acquit the Jews from the charge of homicide. If there is no misdirection, so this indeed addresses the issue under discussion rather than distracts us from it by throwing up a smokescreen, then it means that Jesus' laying down his life corresponds to or take the place of the Jews' homicide as the cause – the culprit, if you will – of his death. The two are said in the same sense, as different explanations to the same event. In other words, *instead* of saying that Jesus died because this was a case of homicide by the Jews, Jesus died because he laid down his own life, and the latter is stated in the same sense as the former. But this necessarily means that Brown has made this into a case of suicide.

Unless Brown is willing to assert that Jesus committed suicide, which is contradicted by all the biblical passages already presented and many others not displayed here, and in which case he has become a type of blasphemer that requires immediate excommunication from all Christian churches, seminaries, and organizations, he must admit the failure of this response to the question of whether the Jews murdered Jesus, retract the argument, and repent before God for this sacrilege. It is astounding how low and how far someone will go in order to defend murderers.

As for the biblical verses he cites in support for this second response, we should address them as well. We should begin from the assumption that these verses cannot say that Jesus laid down his life in a sense that is useful to Brown's argument. As we noted, the only sense that would support his point is if the verses state that Jesus committed suicide, so that the Jews did not commit homicide against him. But again, such a suggestion is contradicted by a host of biblical passages, some of which we have already examined. So even before examining the two passages Brown uses, we understand that his interpretation must be just another case of misdirection. He uses the passages to address the issue in question when they at best address the issue on another level. That is, he makes a statement that is relevant only to X as if he is giving an answer to Y.

He cites half of 1 John 3:16, which says, "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us." But it says more than this. The entire verse reads, "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. *And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.*" Just as Jesus sacrificed his life for Christians, John exhorts the Christians to sacrifice their lives for one another. The juxtaposition of the two indicates that, at least in this context and in the sense that John is speaking of it, Christians can sacrifice their lives to save other believers in a manner analogous to the way Jesus sacrificed his life for God's chosen ones.

Since this is the case, then it means that if the sacrificial nature of Christ's death removes murder from the equation ("no one" killed him), then the sacrificial nature of the Christians' death for one another also removes murder from the equation. And if this were

the case, then consider the following scenario. Suppose some Jews were about to stone some of my Christian brothers to death, and I stand between the two groups in order to shield the Christians, offering my life so that perhaps my brothers would have several more seconds to escape such a painful and bloody demise. The Jews look at one another, shrug, and proceed to hurl their rocks at me with practiced force and accuracy. My soul rises to meet the Lord Jesus, who welcomes me to his bosom, and assures me that my sacrifice has honored him and has saved the lives of several believers. This scenario, by the way, would have been a realistic one, even a familiar one, around the time 1 John 3:16 was written.

Now, according to Brown, because my death was of a sacrificial nature, because I laid down my life willingly in order to save my brothers in Christ, what the Jews did should not be considered murder – "no one" murdered me, even if the rocks and the bloody corpse scream the opposite. If his application of the sacrificial nature of Christ is applied to my sacrificial death, then this is the necessary implication. If it is objected that Christ's death is unique, I have no problem with that in general, except my sacrifice would be analogous in the context in which 1 John 3:16 associates Christ's sacrifice and a Christian's sacrifice, and it is Brown who uses this verse to show that Christ's death was sacrificial *such that* the Jews did not really murder him.

Of course, if the principle applies to sacrificial death in general, this would also mean that all those Jews who sacrificed their lives to save other Jews from the Nazis were not in fact murdered. They willingly laid their lives down, and therefore "no one" killed them. However, whether a death constitutes murder depends on whether a person has unjustly inflicted fatal injuries to the victim, not whether the victim willingly laid his life down, perhaps to protect another person from the homicidal maniac. This standard would be applied against the Nazis for the death of the Jews, against any murderer for the death of any victim of murder, willing or not. But when it comes to Jesus, somehow it was not a murder, and no one killed him. When we apply the same standard – that is, the very definition of murder – then the answer of whether the Jews murdered Jesus does not rest in what Jesus did, but what the Jews did. And they indeed murdered him.

What is it then? To use the sacrificial nature of a death to define murder out of the picture is to make a mockery of the sacrifice. It is to punish the hero for his valor. Rather, sacrifice should generate a stark contrast to the selfish and hateful disposition of the murderers, those who are given to taking life instead of giving life. To honor the sacrificial death of Christ, instead of saying that "no one" killed him, we should stress that the Jews murdered him, an innocent man, their messiah, even God himself, the author of life.

His quotation from John 10 is likewise incomplete. Out of the omitted portion (v. 12-16), verse 12 is especially relevant: "The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it." This verse determines the sense in which the shepherd is said to lay down his life for the sheep, namely, he sacrifices his life in order to protect the

sheep from "the wolf." That is, there is an attacker in this scenario that Brown hides from us by omitting verse 12.

Therefore, when Jesus says, "No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord" (v. 18a), the "no one" cannot mean what Brown wants it to mean, since Jesus has referred to a "wolf" that attacks and kills the shepherd. For this "no one" to help Brown's argument, Jesus would have had to simply drop dead on the streets of Jerusalem with no apparent human involvement. But he did not drop dead – he was murdered. Rather, the statement, "no one takes it from me," has to do with what he says next: "I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father" (v. 18b). The emphasis is on the Father's command and Jesus' decision to follow that command. That is, Jesus laid down his life in accordance with God's will and for the purpose of saving his sheep.

It is not that no one attacked him, but that no one could have successfully murdered him if he had not decided to sacrifice himself. The issue has to do with metaphysical power and not moral responsibility. The Jews would have been responsible for murder, morally speaking, even if they had failed, since they wanted to and tried to kill Jesus. The passage merely explains why they would succeed. Indeed, Jesus could have called on his Father to send "twelve legions of angels" to rescue him from the Jews, but in accordance to John 10, he decided to sacrifice himself to save his sheep. But how does this absolve the Jews? As Jesus said to Pilate, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above" (John 19:11a). And then he adds, "Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin" (v. 11b). This is an explicit and undeniable statement from the mouth of Jesus himself that the Jews were even more guilty than the Romans. Then, "Pilate tried to set Jesus free," but the Jews threatened him (John 19:12).

Jesus was murdered. Who did it? The New Testament screams that the Jews murdered him, and Jesus himself said that the Jews were more guilty than the Romans (John 19:11). That he laid down his life means only that the murderers were able to do it. It does not mean that they did not kill him, or that they were not to blame for doing it. Judas betrayed Jesus – Jesus did not turn himself in. Although the betrayal was foreordained, and although Jesus said to Judas, "What you are about to do, do quickly" (John 13:27), it does not mean that the betrayal did not happen, or that he was not to blame for it. Rather, Jesus said, "The Son of Man will go as it has been decreed, but woe to that man who betrays him" (Luke 22:22). The Jews offered false testimonies against Jesus – he did not produce false testimonies against himself. The Jews shouted, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" – he did not say, "Crucify me! Crucify me!" And afterward the apostles explained that the Jews murdered him. Brown's argument distorts and contradicts Jesus' own statement, the apostolic record of what happened, and the apostolic interpretation of what happened.

(3) Jesus died as the payment for our sins, and therefore it was our sins that nailed Him to the cross.¹⁰

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 197.

Brown is answering the questions, "But did the Jews really kill Jesus? What does the New Testament say?" This popular response is extremely deceptive and shameless, but for many Christians, it is also the most persuasive. This is because all Christians acknowledge that Christ died as an atonement for the sins of the elect,¹¹ and this response implies that one must almost deny the atonement in order to attribute the death of Christ to some factor other than sin, such as to say that the Jews murdered him. In fact, Brown follows up with just such a threat: "It has sometimes been said that a person has not truly repented until he realizes that it is his own sins that nailed Jesus to the cross."¹²

However, this response is perhaps the most blatant example of misdirection. Whether the Jews murdered Jesus has to do with the concrete and tangible factors at the time, but the answer that Brown gives pertains to the abstract and spiritual factors that were behind the atonement. Jesus' death occurred at a definite time in history, and our question pertains to the historical factors operating in that very narrow period that led to the event. We are asking about *that*, and that *only*.

Brown's answer, perhaps the most popular one offered, makes a true statement that relates to something else, but ignores the question altogether. That is, it answers a question about M (as in murder) with a statement about A (as in atonement). But since what it says about A is essential to the Christian faith, it prevents less perceptive believers from rejecting it as an answer to M as well, lest they be accused of undermining A. More than a deception and a smokescreen, it is also a strong-arm tactic. In any case, since it does not address the question, it fails as a response. Otherwise, Brown might as well say that the nails killed Jesus, or that he was killed by excessive bleeding, so that no person is responsible. These statements would be true in themselves, but they again fail to address our question.

Our sins made the atonement necessary, if we were to be saved, but this does not address the question of who murdered Jesus. We have already established that the Jews murdered him, and referring to the atonement merely points out the reason that God has ordained this murder, but it does not absolve the Jews of murder. Again, Jesus taught that the evil that God has decreed must come, but woe to the man through whom it comes! Thus the atonement, which was ordained by God, had to occur, but woe to those who murdered him!

If we refuse to address the question concerning the murder of Jesus, or if we provide irrelevant answers concerning it, then we trivialize the murder aspect of his death. And to trivialize the murder of our Lord would make us unfaithful servants, even human scum. If we take the death of Christ seriously and have respect for what he has done for us, then this must be our estimation of those who deny that he was murdered by the Jews, or those who attempt to distract us from the topic with deceptive and irrelevant answers. They are human scum, and traitors to Christ and all Christians.

¹¹ Those who deny the atonement are not Christians at all.

¹² Brown, *Jewish People*, p. 198.

Rather, we must specify and accuse those responsible for the murder, and then address them in the manner commanded by our Lord. We must not shrug off the issue as unimportant, or by saying that we all killed him. No, we did not – we did not all kill him, not in the sense in which the question is asked. If we disallow the question to define and thus restrict the context of our response, then we illegitimately regard the question itself as unimportant, even meaningless, so that any limitation of context is self-imposed and arbitrary. However, the question indeed can be and has been meaningfully posed, so that if the context of the answer does not correspond with the context defined by the question, then the question has not been answered. Brown fails to prove his case by his misdirection, since he does not even address the issue.

As for his threat, it is instead more fair to say that a person has not truly repented until he submits to the biblical testimony, to Christ and to the apostles, so that he agrees with them that the Jews murdered Jesus, and that the Jews were even more guilty than the Gentiles. In fact, the testimony of Scripture is so pervasive and overwhelming that it is difficult to see how we can avoid making this a test for orthodoxy, and to install it as a necessary part of all Christian creeds. The Apostle's Creed includes the affirmation that Christ "suffered under Pontius Pilate," but considering the amount of attention Scripture devotes to recording the part that the Jews played in his murder, and Jesus' own statement that the Jews were "guilty of a greater sin" (John 19:11), the Creed would be vastly improved if it were to add "murdered by the Jews."

Once the biblical evidence is shown to a professing believer, to reject the idea that the Jews murdered Jesus is to reject the inspiration of Scripture, the authority of Christ, and the authenticity of apostolic ministry. In other words, once a person has been informed of the biblical data, then for him to deny that the Jews murdered Jesus would be at least an indirect repudiation of the Christian faith. The unanswered question is how probable it is for Brown to have been unaware all the biblical passages I cited proving that the Jews murdered Jesus, but I have my suspicions.

(4) There is Jewish responsibility for rejecting the Messiah and giving Him over to the Romans to be executed, but when the Jewish people are confronted with this in the New Testament, the Jews are told either that they acted in ignorance, or that Jesus' death was ordained by God or that Jesus rose from the dead and that there is hope for redemption if they would repent. The message is even called "Good News"! (Note also that Jewish responsibility for the death of Jesus primarily fell on a limited number of Jewish people as opposed to the nation as a whole.)¹³

Then Brown adds, "Listen to the testimony of the Word,"¹⁴ and cites Acts 2:22-23, 36-39,¹⁵ and Acts 3:13-15, 17, and also Acts 13:26-33.¹⁶ Thus he makes four points: (1) The

¹³ Ibid., p. 198-199.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Adding, "see also Acts 4:25-28."

¹⁶ I will not take the space to cite these passages, but feel free to look them up in the Bible before continuing on to my response.

Jews acted in ignorance; (2) Jesus' death was ordained by God; (3) There is hope for redemption if they would repent; and (4) Jewish responsibility fell on a limited number of Jewish people. The verses of Scripture he cites are supposed to support these four contentions.

Recall that this fourth response is supposed to answer the questions, "But did the Jews really kill Jesus? What does the New Testament say?" Brown obviously asserts the negative by this answer, that is, that the Jews did not "really kill Jesus" and that the New Testament says that the Jews did not "really kill Jesus." All his previous attempts have backfired. They have made Brown appear incompetent and dishonest in dealing with the relevant arguments and biblical passages, and they have made the case against the Jews even stronger by highlighting the New Testament insistence that the Jews murdered Jesus. We will see that this fourth attempt is also futile.

Again, this fourth response itself includes four points. Since the first point is new and so demands the most attention, we will address it last.

The second point appeals to foreordination to excuse the Jews. This repeats his first answer, which I refuted a number of pages earlier. We noted that it is misdirection, that moral responsibility relates only to divine commandments, and so on. The third point, that the apostle preached hope to the Jews, has to do with the Christian reaction toward the fact that the Jews murdered Jesus, and in itself has no direct relevance to whether the Jews murdered him in the first place.

This third point becomes relevant only when we ask, "In light of the fact that the Jews murdered Jesus, how should Christians react?" We will indeed address this later. Brown follows his fourth answer with a condemnation of violent reaction against the Jews: "What a contrast between the historic 'Christian' message, which condemned and hated Jews for killing Jesus, calling them 'Christ killers' and often going on violent rampages against Jewish people after Easter services."¹⁷ There is no need to doubt that some of those who claimed to be Christians indeed preached and practiced such a reaction to the murder of Jesus, but whether the Jews were guilty of murder and whether the Christians should react in kind are two separate issues. What the Jews did and what Christians ought to do are distinguishable topics, but Brown consistently mixes the two in the several pages of his book that are now under examination. This is also misdirection, and betrays a lack of fairness, honesty, or competence and intelligence.

As for the fourth point, that only a limited number of Jews were responsible for the death of Jesus, we have also demonstrated the error of this claim earlier in this chapter when we performed a survey of relevant biblical verses. Here, to show how outrageous and inexcusable it is to assert that only a limited number of Jews were responsible, I will refute Brown's claim for a second time using the very verses that he cites for this fourth response.

¹⁷ Brown, *Jewish People*, p. 200.

In Acts 2:22, Peter addresses the "Men of Israel," the Jewish crowd that gathered around him on the day of Pentecost. He is not addressing the Jewish leaders or the limited number of Jews that Brown has in mind. In fact, "there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from *every nation under heaven*" (2:5). And in Acts 2:23, he says, "You...put him to death by nailing him to the cross." So Peter blames the Jews for the murder of Jesus, for nailing him to the cross, and he places the blame to the "Men of Israel." Contrary to Brown, who claims that the responsibility did not fall on "the nation as a whole," Peter blames the Jews "from every nation under heaven."

While we are at it, note again that verse 23 mentions that the death was foreordained and that the Jews had "the help of wicked men." Yet the blame for murder still falls on the Jews. Therefore, Peter recognizes the factors of God's foreordination and Gentile involvement – things that Brown uses to direct the murder charge away from the Jews – but still accuses the Jews as the ones responsible for the murder of Jesus.

In Acts 3:13-15, Peter addresses "all the people" (see 3:9, 11) who were present at the temple, and he declares, "You handed him over...You disowned him...[You] asked that a murderer be released...You killed the author of life." In Acts 3:17, he says, "I know that you acted...as did your leaders." So Peter makes a distinction between "you" (the Jewish people in general) and "your leaders," and declares that both groups "acted" in the murder of Jesus.

Then, in Acts 13:27, Paul says, "The people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize Jesus, yet in condemning him they fulfilled the words of the prophets that are read every Sabbath." He blames the murder of Jesus on both "the people of Jerusalem" as well as "their rulers," and not only the rulers. Thus the verses Brown cites to support his case contradict his own assertion, but instead reinforce the idea that the Jews murdered Jesus, and that the culprits were not limited to a small group.¹⁸

Returning to Brown's first point, Acts 3:17 says that the Jews "acted in ignorance." Brown does not tell us what we are supposed to infer from this, but if we assume that he stays on topic, then we should think that he mentions this to answer, in the negative, the questions, "But did the Jews really kill Jesus? What does the New Testament say?" From Brown's perspective, the only meaningful use of Acts 3:17 would be to remove or reduce the Jews' responsibility for the murder of Jesus based on their ignorance. If this is not the connection that he attempts to make, then the point is irrelevant, and requires no answer at all. So we will assume that this is what he intends to imply. Ambiguity exists due to his inferior scholarship, in that he fails to establish relevance or even fails to perceive the need to do so. But to continue this interaction, we must assume his intention for now.

The meaning and implication of this ignorance must be explicated. Just because a person is ignorant of *something* does not mean that he is never guilty of *anything*. In fact, the biblical ethic is such that even if a person is ignorant in a sense that is relevant to the situation – he is ignorant of what is right and wrong in that situation – he is still guilty of sin and will be punished if he transgresses God's commands.

¹⁸ For additional refutations, see the list of biblical passages presented earlier in the chapter.

To illustrate this principle, Jesus says, "That servant who knows his master's will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows. But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked" (Luke 12:47-48).

The one who is ignorant in the sense that he lacks information regarding right and wrong, if he transgresses, will be punished with less severity, but he will still be punished. He is still guilty. This is because moral responsibility has to do with the degree of compliance that one's thoughts, words, and actions demonstrate toward God's commandments. To know what is right and still do wrong (or to know what is wrong and still do it) deserves more severe punishment only because it is God's stated precept that to know what is right and still do wrong is in itself another sin (James 4:17). It does not mean that the person who transgresses his commands out of ignorance is innocent or will not be punished.

In what sense were the Jews ignorant? What exactly were they ignorant of? If their ignorance refers to a lack of knowledge or information, exactly what knowledge or information did they not have? And how does this affect our understanding of the question, that is, of whether the Jews murdered Jesus? When we consider the issue this way, the most relevant piece of information was whether they knew that they were insisting on killing an innocent man.

Many people fail to recognize this point – when the question is whether the Jews committed murder, it is *completely irrelevant* as to whether they knew that he was the Messiah, since by definition, to murder is to intentionally kill any innocent man. And we can be certain that the Jews knew that they were killing an innocent man. Jesus repeatedly challenged the Jews to charge him with sin, asking them for what reason they wanted to stone him, but they failed to answer this challenge. At the trial of Jesus, they could not even make their own false testimonies agree with one another. Then, Pilate repeatedly confronted them with Jesus' innocence, declaring that he had committed no crime. And on the same occasion, the Jews demanded that Pilate release Barabbas, whom they knew was a murderer, instead of Jesus, whom they knew was innocent.

In fact, they could not rightly claim ignorance even concerning the fact that Jesus was the Messiah, and that they would be killing the Messiah. Jesus explicitly told them who he was at the trial:

The high priest said to him, "I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God."

"Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied. "But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven." (Matthew 26:63-64; see also Mark 14:61-62, Luke 22:67-70)

In addition, he told Pilate that he was the King of the Jews, and Pilate repeated this to the Jews as well (Matthew 27:11; Mark 15:2, 9, 12; Luke 23:3; John 18:37, 19:14-15). Ignorance due to a stubborn rejection of the truth is different from ignorance due to a lack of opportunity to learn the truth, and if the latter could not grant moral exemption (Luke 12:47-48), then still less can the former. If the Jews did not know he was the Messiah, it was only because they refused to believe him. The truth was not concealed.

Therefore, on the basis of the numerous biblical passages that we have examined that directly incriminate the Jews for the murder of Jesus, it is impossible that the Jews killed Jesus out of "ignorance" in any sense that absolves or excuses them from the charge of murder. The ignorance refers to something else that is relevant to Peter's preaching in Acts 3 – and we will say what this is when we conclude this section – but that is irrelevant and unhelpful to Brown's position regarding the Jews. They knew what they were doing, that they were killing an innocent man. They were ignorant in a different sense.

Although there is no need to say more in order to maintain our position, that the Jews murdered Jesus, we can indeed say more. To begin, we shall further demolish Brown's case by showing that the very biblical passages he cites for this section once again contradict his own position.

Acts 3:17 says, "Now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders." This verse indeed says that the Jews acted in ignorance, but it does say that they *acted*. So, although the Jews killed Jesus out of their ignorance, whatever this means, it cannot mean that it was an accident or that they were completely oblivious. Also, when Peter adds, "as did your leaders," he makes a distinction between the Jewish leaders and the general Jewish population, so that when he says "you acted" – that "you" murdered Jesus – he has in mind all the Jews in general, only that the leaders *also* acted.

Brown also cites from Acts 13. But there Paul says that in killing Jesus the Jews "fulfilled the words of the prophets that are read every Sabbath" (v. 27). So the Jews could not have been ignorant of the words of the prophet, and Paul notes that these words were about Jesus, even predicting the manner in which he would die. Although Brown stops at verse 17 when he quotes from Acts 3, Peter utters a similar statement in the very next verse: "But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Christ would suffer" (v. 18). So, again, the Jews were not ignorant about what the prophets predicted, including the manner of death that Christ would suffer.

Paul continues in Acts 13: "Though they found no proper ground for a death sentence, they asked Pilate to have him executed" (v. 28). Keep in mind that this verse is included in Brown's scriptural quotations. It is highly significant because it demonstrates that the Jews pressed for the execution of Jesus without proper ground for a death sentence. That is, they killed him without justification. Justification in this case would have meant proof of some crime that provided ground for the death sentence. They knew they did not have this proof or warrant, even though they tried to provide false testimonies against him.

And Pilate repeatedly confronted them with Jesus' innocence. The Jews were not ignorant of these things.

The biblical verses that Brown uses do not support his position, but rather argues for the opposite, that the Jews murdered Jesus, that they did it with full knowledge, premeditation, carried out their objective with persistence, and that the entire biblical testimony blames the Jews for this. It was the most obvious and indefensible case of murder in all of history. Whatever they were ignorant of, they were not ignorant of the fact that Jesus was an innocent man, that he was found without guilt by both Jews and Gentiles. They were not ignorant of their own action and intention, that they were killing him. Thus the Jews were not ignorant of the fact that they were killing an innocent man, but still they insisted on killing him. By definition, this means that the Jews murdered Jesus, and they knew it.

Brown's misleading appeal to the Jews' ignorance is further exposed and refuted when we go beyond the biblical verses that he uses. For example, Paul writes:

Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life. (1 Timothy 1:13-16)

We are not sure exactly what to say about the irrelevance of ignorance to counter Brown, since he never specified the relevance between the ignorance of the Jews and the topic under discussion. As we noted, he never explained what this ignorance means, its significance and implication, and even what the Jews were ignorant of. That is, according to Brown, how does the ignorance of the Jews affect the argument, or the question concerning the Jews' role in the murder of Jesus? Any ambiguity on our end is necessitated by Brown's careless and incompetent scholarship.

Nevertheless, an examination of Paul's statement concerning his ignorance, and his own statement here and other biblical verses about the nature of who he was and what he did, will be more than sufficient to provide a broad refutation of whatever Brown intends to prove by asserting the Jews' ignorance. The New Testament is in fact clear about this ignorance of the Jews and its significance. Brown misuses it.

Paul states that when he persecuted the church before his conversion, he "acted in ignorance and unbelief." But he does not then say that, because of his ignorance, he was therefore not a blasphemer, not a persecutor, and not a violent man. Ignorance did not absolve him, excuse him, or permit him to portray himself as less wicked than he was. In fact, he goes on to say that he was even "the worst of sinners" (v. 16), and that was for

persecuting the Christians, and not for murdering Christ, although morally speaking there is no difference (Acts 9:5).

As for the nature of his ignorance, he did not lack any knowledge or information that would overturn his own admission to being a blasphemer, persecutor, and a violent man. He was not ignorant that the Jews were stoning Stephen when he did nothing to deserve the death sentence, and he was not ignorant of approving the murder (Acts 8:1). Then, Acts 9:1 says that he was "breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord" (NASB). Note the word "murder," or "slaughter" (KJV). He was not ignorant of doing that. Later he said that he "persecuted the followers of this Way *to their death*" (Acts 22:4). To persecute people "to their death" when they have done nothing to deserve punishment by death is, by definition, mass murder. He was not ignorant that he was doing this.

Therefore, when Paul writes that he "acted in ignorance," he could not be referring to a lack of knowledge or information that renders his actions morally good or neutral, or even accidental. If the objection is that Paul thought he was doing right at the time, we can say the same thing about Hitler, that he also thought he was doing the right thing when he slaughtered the Jews. Would any Jew or Christian accept this as an excuse, or a reason not to blame Hitler? In any case, we can answer this objection from Paul's testimony. He says, "I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth" (Acts 26:9). Yet, the New Testament still calls his action "murder," as he himself also admits. And if what he did in his "ignorance" was murder, then what the Jews did to Jesus in their "ignorance" was also murder.

Both Peter and Paul relate ignorance with the possibility of repentance and forgiveness, and not to diminish the severity of previous sin. In Acts 3, Peter says, "Now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance...Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out" (v. 17, 19). And in 1 Timothy 1, Paul writes, "Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly" (v. 13-14). Again, they do not say that because they acted in ignorance, therefore the Jews were not murderers, or that therefore Paul was not a persecutor or a violent man. They *were* murderers, and so was Paul, but they could be forgiven and he was forgiven because they acted in ignorance.

So if the ignorance is thus connected with the possibility of repentance and forgiveness, to go beyond this ignorance and sin as the Jews and Paul did would be to go beyond the point where the possibility remains for repentance and forgiveness. Again, if they could repent and be forgiven *because* they acted in ignorance, this means that if they had gone beyond this ignorance and acted in a similar manner, repentance and forgiveness would have been impossible.

What is implied in Peter and Paul, therefore, is the doctrine that is stated in Hebrews 6: "It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of

God and the powers of the coming age, if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace" (v. 4-6; see also Hebrews 10:26-31 and 2 Peter 2:20-22). All that Peter and Paul mean is that the Jews and Paul himself had not reached that stage where repentance was no longer possible. But this does not help Brown when our focus is on the questions, "But did the Jews really kill Jesus? What does the New Testament say?"

As Brown concludes his fourth response, now refuted, he writes, "And note carefully that there is not a single time in the entire New Testament that the charge of deicide is ever raised, either explicitly or implicitly."¹⁹ He brings this up because at the beginning of his chapter he claims that some Christians accuse the Jews of committing deicide (killing God). Of course, we are not interested in proving that the Jews committed deicide, since God as such could not be murdered. Nevertheless, Brown's statement that "there is not a single time that the charge of deicide is ever raised" is inaccurate. In Acts 3:15, Peter says, "You killed the author of life" or "the prince of life" (KJV). Unless Brown believes that there is an author or prince of life other than God, this is a direct accusation of, in Brown's term, deicide. And in Acts 20:28, Paul says, "Be shepherds of the church of *God*, which he bought with *his own blood*." Since the Jews were the ones who made him shed his own blood, this is another mention of deicide. Contrary to Brown, who asserts that the New Testament does not mention deicide "either explicitly or implicitly," it in fact mentions deicide *both* explicitly and implicitly.

Again, God as such could not be killed. But God in the person of his Son took upon himself human flesh, and *that* could be killed. The truth that Jesus was both fully divine and fully human was so ingrained in the minds of the biblical writers that at times we find them refer to Jesus' divine side while speaking of things that pertain to his human nature, and at times to his human side while speaking of things that pertain to his divine nature. Although the divine nature and human nature were never mingled or confused, the one person possesses both so that it is acceptable to use a term that seems to designate one nature while describing activities that could only be done with the other nature. Again, this is acceptable because although there are two natures involved, we are referring to only one person, Jesus Christ. So, although no one could kill God as such, that is, the divine nature of Christ, Brown's statement that deicide is never mentioned remains inaccurate and misleading.

This fourth response insists that the message to the Jews is called "good news." This is true enough, but it has nothing to do with whether Christians should blame the Jews for the murder of Jesus. The good news to the Jews is not that they did not murder Jesus, but that although they did murder him, they could still repent and receive forgiveness. To mention this point, that the message of the apostles was good news to the Jews, without explanation as to how it is good, and as if it supports Brown's position on the issue in question, is another instance of misdirection, which displays either incompetence or dishonesty, or both.

¹⁹ Brown, *Jewish People*, p. 200.

(5) The Romans made a legal decision and committed the physical act of crucifying the Son of God, but this only highlights the point I have been making, since no one would ever think of hating the Italians today because some of their ancestors crucified Jesus. Of course not!

This is Brown's fifth and final answer to the questions, "But did the Jews really kill Jesus? What does the New Testament say?" Assuming that he is keeping these questions in mind as he writes this, the answer therefore intends to say, "No, the Jews did not really kill Jesus, but the Romans did. And the New Testament says so." Since there are so many things wrong with his answer, I must divide my response into two sections. The first deals with the statement that the Romans killed Jesus, and the second deals with the latter part about "hating the Italians." Of course, he relates these two things, and so I will address the connection as well.

It is true that the Romans "made a legal decision and committed the physical act" of killing Jesus. Unlike Brown, we do not desire to obscure or distort the New Testament record. Yes, the Romans played an important role. And unlike Brown, who covers up the murder of the one he calls Lord, we would not say that even though they did this, they were not to blame. Of course the Romans were to blame. Of course! Of course they committed murder. It would be sinful and unjust to say that the Romans did not "really" murder Jesus as Brown says that the Jews did not "really" kill him. We are unafraid to mention Acts 4:27, which says, "Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed." Nevertheless, even this verse says that "the people of Israel" were involved.

However, it would be wrong to say that the Romans must therefore assume most or all of the blame. In fact, both Jesus and the apostles recognized the role that the Romans played in the murder, and never absolved them, but both almost exclusively blamed the Jews for the murder, for their part in it. We have already provided all the evidence needed to prove this point, and any reader should be able to acknowledge this by now. So we will only review some of the biblical data without a thorough repetition of what we have already presented.

There is the incontrovertible statement from Jesus, who said to Pilate, "Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin" (John 19:11). This is sufficient to establish the case so that no matter how much the Romans were involved in the murder of Jesus, the Lord himself insisted that the Jews were more guilty. On the basis of this statement, the more someone blames the Romans, the more he bolsters the case against the Jews. Brown does not mention this verse in his answers to the topic. Either he has not come across it in his supposedly thorough and expert research, or he has covered it up.

Then, as we also noted, Pilate confronted the Jews with the innocence of Jesus at least three times, but the Jews threatened him, shouting the name of Caesar (John 19:12). Pilate washed his hands before the Jews, disclaiming any guilt for the murder of this innocent man. Such a ceremonial gesture does nothing to repudiate actual guilt, since

unlike Brown, we would insist that murder is murder, and Pilate was indeed guilty. But the Jews were even more guilty, having no respect for divine command, human law, or innocent life, they shouted, "Let his blood be on us and on our children!" (Matthew 27:25). They were willing to damn themselves if they could only murder Jesus. As a final attempt to make the Jews choose what was right, Pilate presented them with Jesus and Barabbas, a known murderer. The Jews chose Barabbas.

When the apostles preached the gospel to the Jews, they acknowledged the role that the Romans played in the murder of Jesus, but the blame was placed squarely on the Jews: "You, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross" (Acts 2:23). There is recognition of "the help of wicked men," but the subject that performed the action was said to be "You," the Jews – "You...put him to death."

Acts 2:36 says, "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." The verse addresses Israel, the Jews, and says, "Jesus, whom *you crucified*." The Jews were so entirely responsible for the murder of Jesus that the apostles, although they knew the distinction, said that the Jews crucified Jesus. In other words, although one could recognize the distinction, the Jews were so guilty of the murder that there was no need to even mention the Romans, so that the apostles simply said that the Jews crucified Jesus. Another example is Acts 10:39, where Peter says, "We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a tree." That is, "the Jews...killed him by hanging him on a tree." Again, although Acts 2:23 shows us that Peter knew the details of the events and understood the distinction between the roles that the Jews and the Romans played, here the crucifixion is directly blamed on the Jews without mention of the Romans.

Thus the apostles blamed the Jews for the murder of Jesus not because they lacked information about the proceedings or lacked the ability to make intelligent distinctions, but because when the details of the events were considered, including Pilate's testimony of Jesus' innocence and the Jews' insistence to kill him anyway, it was clear that the Jews were the main instigator and enforcer of the murder of Jesus. It was carried out by prolonged premeditation, multiple attempts, false testimonies, political threats against Roman officials, and a concerted effort of a large group of Jews. Since we have already examined this point and considered the relevant verses several times, we will not press this further. It is sufficient to say that in bringing up the Romans, Brown has helped us to stress one more time, on the basis of overwhelming New Testament evidence, that the Jews were guilty of the murder of Jesus, and that this was also the interpretation of the events given by the Lord and the apostles.

The latter part of Brown's argument reads, "This only highlights the point I have been making, since no one would ever think of hating the Italians today because some of their ancestors crucified Jesus." The reasoning is that since the Romans were the ones who crucified Jesus, if we are not "hating" the Romans or their descendents for this, then still less should we hate the Jews. This argument fails on many levels. We will examine only three of them.

First, the argument commits an "is-ought" fallacy. That is, it argues from what *is* done to what *ought* to be done. Or, it implies that what is right is what we are already doing. Let us agree with Brown that we do not hate the Romans or their descendents (hereafter only "Romans") for the crucifixion of Jesus. This does not mean that we ought not to hate them. Perhaps we should hate them for the crucifixion of Jesus, and the fact that we do not hate them is a case of sinful negligence or indifference on our part. Perhaps we should repent of this and begin to hate the Romans.

To equate "is" with "ought" eliminates all instances of moral transgressions, since what is done is always what ought to be done, and what ought to be done is defined by what is already being done. Therefore, there are no current moral transgressions. The only way to commit a moral transgression would be to deviate from current practice. But once this new practice becomes the norm, thus the "is," it has also become the "ought." In fact, on the basis of the is-ought fallacy, if hatred for the Jews is universal, then it would be the right thing to do. The more widespread it is, the more morally established it is. The more applicable the "is," the stronger the "ought" becomes.

Brown uses the is-ought fallacy to argue against hatred toward the Jews on the basis that there is no hatred toward the Romans. But if there are two current states of affairs, then the is-ought fallacy can be turned around against Brown. That is, if there is current hatred toward the Jews, then one can use the is-ought fallacy to say that then there ought also be hatred against the Romans also. Thus on a similar basis, one can argue for the opposite position, so that to people who hate the Jews, one can say, "The Romans made the legal decision and committed the physical acts of crucifying the Lord Jesus. Since no one would think of *not* hating the Jews today, we should therefore hate the Romans also." In this case, the is-ought fallacy works both ways, and self-destructs. Of course, we are not advocating hatred against either the Romans or the Jews, but we are refuting an invalid argument.

Second, we cannot say that we should not hate the Jews *because* we do not already hate the Romans, since Jesus declared that the Jews were "guilty of greater sin" (John 19:11), and the apostles designated the Jews as the ones who crucified Jesus, sometimes excluding mention of the Romans altogether, so that *even if* we equate "is" and "ought," that there is no hate toward the Romans says nothing about whether there ought to be hate toward the Jews. In other words, since the Jews incurred greater guilt, the fact that we do not hate the one with the lesser guilt does not give us guidance as to whether we ought to hate the one with the greater guilt.

Brown's argument assumes that if we ought to hate anyone at all, we ought to hate the Romans. Since we do not hate the Romans, then still less should we hate the Jews. If this type of argument works at all, it would work only if the Romans had incurred equal or greater guilt than the Jews in the murder of Jesus. But since the Jews incurred greater guilt than the Romans in the murder of Jesus, lenience toward the Romans in our attitude and practice provides no guidance regarding what ought to be our attitude and practice toward the Jews. Brown's assumption is that, if there is guilt at all, the Romans had

incurred the greater guilt, but this is the opposite of the position asserted by the Lord Jesus and the apostles.

Third, Brown's argument fails because he commits the fallacy of equivocation, not only when it comes to this fifth answer, but also throughout the chapter in which these arguments appear. Specially, he seems to use the words (or ideas of) "blame," "hate," and "persecute" as if they are interchangeable, and uses the three words together in a sentence near the end of the chapter.

However, these words are not interchangeable. To "blame" is to assign responsibility for a negative action, effect, or some such thing, to a personal or non-personal agent. It has no necessary connection with an attitude or response toward the agent blamed. I can blame a person for doing something wrong without having a negative attitude toward him and without doing anything to punish him for it. To "hate" is to harbor a hostile attitude toward someone or something. Again, it has no necessary relationship with to "blame" or to "persecute." It is possible to hate someone without cause. It would be irrational and immoral to do so, but it is possible. And just because a person hates someone does not mean that he will "persecute" him, or do something to harm him. The person has a hostile policy toward him, so that he might indeed persecute, but the two are distinguishable and not interchangeable. Then, to "persecute" refers to the act of harming or punishing a target. And again, it has no necessary relationship with "blame" and "hate," although some kind of relationship is possible.

Brown poses the questions at the beginning of his chapter that are supposed to frame the entire discussion: "But did the Jews really kill Jesus? What does the New Testament say?" These questions refer to blame, and blame alone. Thus when he uses words like "hate" and "persecute" in other places, unless he successfully relates them to the issue of blame, he is failing to address the questions that he himself poses. If by the fifth argument he implies, "Because there is no *hate* toward the Romans, there ought to be no *blame* toward the Jews," then we must complain that he equivocates, and raises an irrelevant point. But if he implies, "Because there is no *hate* toward the Romans, there ought to be no *hate* toward the Jews," then in addition to the fact that he still commits the is-ought fallacy, we must complain that he does not even address the questions he raises at the beginning, which have to do with blame instead of hatred or persecution.

Indeed, Brown's concern about persecution against the Jews is clear from the start, but he states that persecution against the Jews occurs because Christians *blame* the Jews for the murder of Jesus. So, to remove this basis for persecution, he sets out to eliminate the basis for blame. And thus he asks, "But did the Jews really kill Jesus?" instead of "But should we persecute the Jews even though they really killed Jesus?" His cause would be better served by pressing the latter question, but he picks the first and thus fights a losing battle, since the Jews indeed murdered Jesus.

After all the inaccurate statements, misleading arguments, fallacious inferences, and deceptive assertions that Brown has made us suffer, he concludes his chapter on whether the Jews murdered Jesus with this disappointing paragraph:

We can safely say, then, that to blame anyone for Jesus' death is to obscure the greatness of His self-sacrifice and to diminish the depth of His love, and if He died for any reason other than His willful atonement for our sins, we have no Gospel, no New Testament, no hope.²⁰

However, this is the one thing that we cannot safely say, because we have established that the New Testament itself blames the Jews for the murder of Jesus. It does this explicitly, emphatically, and repeatedly.

He claims that if Jesus died for any other "reason" than to make atonement, then we would have no gospel. This is another instance of misdirection, based on a fallacy of equivocation. He uses the word "reason" in a soteriological sense rather than a strictly historical sense, but when we ask, "Did the Jews really kill Jesus?" we are inquiring of the historical factors that led to Jesus' death, which he willingly submitted under in order to make atonement for our sins. These are two related but distinguishable issues, but Brown raises the soteriological reason to suppress the historical reason, and adds to it a veiled threat that if the historical reason is acknowledged, it would destroy the soteriological effect of the entire event. This sophisticated strong-arm tactic is spiritual manipulation. I condemn it by the authority of Christ.

On the other hand, compelled by the biblical testimony, we must turn the threat against Brown himself, although this time the basis is truth and the danger is real. Since we have established beyond any doubt that the New Testament blames the Jews for the murder of Jesus, the acceptance or rejection of this proposition has now become a matter of biblical inerrancy. Once biblical inerrancy has become the issue, the entire basis of one's faith is now at stake.

This study, if presented to Brown, would place him in a position where he is confronted with biblical evidence that is directly opposite to what he affirms. If he does not then recant, repent, and acknowledge that the Jews murdered Jesus, then in effect he would be rejecting a significant portion of the New Testament, including the testimonies of the Lord and the apostles. This would in turn amount to a rejection of biblical inerrancy. And since biblical inerrancy is the foundation of the entire faith, his persistent refusal to acknowledge that the Jews murdered Jesus would amount to a rejection of Christ and the Christian faith. Therefore, once confronted with the biblical evidence, if Brown still refuses to repent and admit that the Jews murdered Jesus, then the only biblical response would be to excommunicate him from all Christian churches, seminaries, and organizations, since he will have declared himself an unbeliever.

The truth is the exact opposite of what Brown claims. That is, if we refuse to affirm that the Jews murdered Jesus even in the light of the above biblical evidence, then in effect we would be rejecting the doctrines of biblical inerrancy, inspiration, and revelation. And thus we would be repudiating the gospel, the New Testament, and our hope. In other words, once you have examined the biblical evidence on this subject, if you are a

²⁰ Ibid., p. 201.

Christian, you must and you will affirm that the Jews murdered Jesus. Otherwise, you will have no basis on which to claim that you believe the Scripture, and therefore no basis on which to claim that you believe the gospel, and no basis on which to claim that you are a Christian or that you possess salvation through faith in Christ.

As for his claim that "to blame anyone for Jesus' death is to obscure the greatness of His self-sacrifice and to diminish the depth of His love," the New Testament again suggests the exact opposite. Once we acknowledge that the Jews could still repent and receive forgiveness through Jesus Christ, the fact that they murdered him in the first place generates a contrast between sin and grace that clarifies rather than obscures "the greatness of His self-sacrifice and to diminish the depth of His love." Rather than saying that no one murdered him, we say that Christ would save even the ones who murdered him, if they would only repent and believe. But if they would not repent, then they would suffer the full measure of the wrath of God. Thus by upholding the biblical testimony that the Jews murdered Jesus, we bear witness to both the "kindness and sternness of God" (Romans 11:22).

On the other hand, if we falsely absolve the Jews for the murder of Jesus, we also reduce this contrast between sin and grace, and diminish the revelation of the greatness of Christ's self-sacrifice and the depth of his love. Of course, we must not invent a contrast to produce this effect, but we have no right to hide or deny the contrast that is already there. But this is what Brown does, and he has the gall to say that those who differ on this diminish the atonement. Now, we read in Luke:

"Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he canceled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?"

Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled."

"You have judged correctly," Jesus said....

"Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven – for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little" (Luke 7:42-43, 47).

As Paul writes, "But where sin increased, grace increased all the more" (Romans 5:20). So by denying or even just de-emphasizing the fact that the Jews murdered Jesus, Brown not only diminishes the greatness of the atonement, but he robs the Jews of a greater appreciation of the grace of Christ and a greater love for him. And by robbing the Jews of this, he also robs all others of an example of grace and forgiveness, and thus greater potential for love toward Christ. Whereas Jesus teaches that he who has been forgiven much, loves much, Brown tries to tell us that there is not as much to forgive as we thought or as the biblical evidence suggests.

Returning to 1 Timothy 1:12-16, Paul offers the same interpretation of his own conversion:

I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service. Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.

Notice the repeated contrast between his sin and Christ's grace. It is because he fully acknowledges his wickedness that he is able to properly magnify Christ's forgiveness. And note that the contrast between sin and grace in his life is intended as an example for others. But a similar example also exists with the Jews, if we would only agree with the biblical testimony that they murdered Jesus! To deny that the Jews murdered Jesus is to annihilate a biblical example of grace – that even those who murdered Jesus *could* be saved, if they would repent and believe.

Nevertheless, we should consider Brown's primary concern, and that is the persecution of the Jews, sometimes by those who claim to be Christians. Before he presents his five fallacious and misleading arguments, now refuted, attempting to show that the Jews did not "really" kill Jesus, he writes, "Of course, even if the broad statement that 'the Jews killed Jesus' was totally true, it would not justify Christian hatred or persecution of the Jewish people."²¹ This statement is correct, and it is a sufficient answer to those professing Christians who think that they should persecute the Jews to avenge the murder of Jesus. Nothing more than this is needed.

The way the early Christians reacted to the murder of Jesus was to place almost all the blame on the Jews, with scarcely any mention of the role that the Romans played, and to say directly that the Jews murdered Jesus. But against this background, they preached to these same Jews the need for repentance and the hope of forgiveness in Jesus Christ, the very one whom they murdered without mercy. True Christians, therefore, do not excuse the Jews, but they blame the Jews for the murder of Jesus as a matter of upholding truth, justice, and history.

The Christian response is not revenge, or to return violence with violence, but to preach truth and mercy – the truth that the Jews murdered an innocent man, their own Messiah, and the mercy that is to be found in this same person whom they murdered. Unlike Brown and many others, the apostles and disciples did not revise history and say that the Jews did not kill Jesus, that the Romans killed Jesus, or that no one killed Jesus. No, the

²¹ Ibid., p. 196.

Jews murdered Jesus, but they could repent and receive forgiveness for this and all their many, many other sins.

Moreover, the fact that the Jews murdered Jesus is declared not only to the Jews themselves, but also proclaimed to all nations, as Paul does in our passage (1 Thessalonians 2:14-16). In fact, Paul does not say only that the Jews murdered Jesus, but also that the Jews murdered the prophets, and that even as he writes, the Jews are persecuting Christians in every place and in every way.

Again, the apostles made this a part of the preaching of the gospel not so that those who are converted would then exact revenge on the Jews for the murder of Jesus, the murder of the prophets, and the murder and persecution of countless Christians. Rather, they stated this in their preaching as a matter of truth and justice, and as part of the historical background of the ministry and atonement of Christ, and then the propagation of the Christian faith.

On the other hand, the despicable practice of trivializing or covering up the murder of an innocent man, no less the God-man that is Jesus our Lord, should have no place in Christian preaching, and should be thrown out of the church wherever it is found. Anyone who distorts history and obscures the truth about how the Jews murdered Jesus, the prophets, and countless Christians should be harshly reprimanded, and if he does not repent, he should be expelled from all Christian fellowship.

We are not doing the Jews a favor by telling them that their predecessors did not really commit all those murders. Doing this would only encourage hard-heartedness, defiance, and self-righteousness in a people that is already characterized by these evil qualities. The Bible teaches that they are a rebellious culture accustomed to persecuting and murdering God's messengers. Their repentance and salvation will involve a break with this tradition. And how do we give them an opportunity to do this, unless we inform or remind them of all the atrocities that they committed? If we do not insist that they committed all these murders, then our message is not faithful to even the Old Testament, which records how the Jews resisted and murdered the prophets. Unless we insist that the Jews committed all these murders, we have not preached the whole Christian faith to them, since this is a prominent aspect of both Jewish and Christian history.

The Christians who have the moral courage to tell the truth about these atrocities committed by the Jews will be accused of anti-Semitism. But this is a most absurd and dishonest reaction, since even if the Jews wish to deny that they murdered Jesus and countless Christians, it remains that the Old Testament testifies that they persecuted and murdered the prophets. And since the record that the Jews also murdered Jesus and his disciples is an integral part of Christian history and doctrine, we respond that to accuse us of anti-Semitism is to be anti-Christian. Are the Jews allowed to make accusations against us, but we are not allowed to make accusations against them? People are all about tolerance when it is their religion, their race, or their culture that is on the line. How about my religion, my race, my culture? Their so-called tolerance is sustained by a much stronger hypocrisy.

Modern Jews want us to sympathize with them about what they suffered under Hitler, and demand us to acknowledge past aggression that Christians showed toward the Jews. And they use threats and accusations based on past suffering to manipulate others and to stifle criticisms. But this represents the height of injustice and hypocrisy unless they also acknowledge that they murdered Jesus and countless Christians. Some of them are proficient at bringing up the past violence and oppression performed by others, but they show no remorse and no repentance about their own past actions. The Jews who repented in Acts 2 were "cut to the heart" and said, "Brothers, what shall we do?" (v. 37). But some of the Jews today want us Christians to be cut to the heart so that they can tell us what to do.

The real issue should be whether this is the truth, that the Jews really murdered Jesus, the prophets, and the disciples. If the Jews deny this, then they must defeat us in argumentation – complaining of anti-Semitism is useless. From a rational perspective, it is only a whiny noise and is irrelevant to the truth. But if it is indeed the truth that the Jews committed all these murders, then to complain of anti-Semitism only means that the truth is anti-Semitic. And if the truth is anti-Semitic, then the Jews really have a problem, do they not? If the truth testifies against them, then it is futile to complain against us. Christians did not create the problem of anti-Semitism. If the truth is anti-Semitic, it is because the Jews killed all these people.

We must not allow those who have been victims to unjust treatment to intimidate and manipulate Christian doctrine, practice, and preaching, to revise history, and to distort the truth. People who fear the accusation of anti-Semitism and therefore suppress the truth do not love the Jews. They hate the Jews and love themselves. Plus, the Jews should not be defended in the murder of Jesus. They were completely wrong, and to defend them is to betray the Lord Jesus all over again, and to share in their guilt for his murder. Just because Jesus is a savior does not mean that we can punish him for his goodness by trivializing the murder aspect of his death.

It remains that anyone who tells the truth like this would be accused of anti-Semitism. And so the question becomes whether a so-called Christian is willing to be called insensitive, intolerant, a racist, an anti-Semite, all for the sake of Christ, truth, and justice. If you will not, it is because you are a man-pleaser. You love yourself more than you love Christ. But Jesus says, "Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven" (Matthew 10:32-33). Are you ashamed to affirm the truth about what happened to him? It does not count if you acknowledge him on your own terms, or if you affirm a distorted version of what he did and what he went through. To truly acknowledge Christ, you must agree with the biblical account concerning his life and work.

Finally, a version of the Christian message in which the Jews did not really murder Jesus will backfire on us. This is because, no matter what someone like Brown says, once the Jews begin to read the New Testament for themselves, they will see that the Christian

faith is one that explicitly and repeatedly insists that the Jews murdered Jesus. To offer an alternative explanation will only discredit ourselves, and make ourselves appear as dishonest and incompetent people. Some Jews might correctly take it as an insult that we would hide the truth from them like this. So we might as well tell the truth from the start. Yes, the Jews murdered Jesus, as well as many other people, but if they will repent and believe in the gospel, they also will be saved by the power and grace of Christ. This and nothing else is the gospel to both the Jews and the Gentiles.

Returning to our passage in 1 Thessalonians 2, Paul continues, "They displease God and are hostile to all men in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. In this way they always heap up their sins to the limit. The wrath of God has come upon them at last" (v. 15-16). He describes the ongoing effort of the Jews to frustrate the works of God on the earth. They killed the prophets and the Lord Jesus (v. 15a), and now they pursue the Christians. Some they drive out. Others they imprison. And the rest they kill.

They do not only refuse the gospel, preferring the fires of hell to the glories of heaven, but they also attempt to prevent the gospel from reaching the Gentiles, often by any means necessary, including murder. Whereas there is much talk about anti-Semitism today, Paul writes that they are the ones who are "hostile to all men," and this is seen in their efforts to impede the progress of the Christian faith, which is the only hope of salvation for mankind. Determined to destroy the Christian faith, in effect they have assigned themselves the task of mass damnation, the instigators of spiritual holocaust. But they could not succeed, for Jesus declared, "Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit" (Matthew 21:43). They murdered Jesus, and the Christians multiplied (Acts 2:41). They murdered Stephen and began "a great persecution" against the church at Jerusalem (Acts 8:1), but then the Christians scattered and preached the gospel everywhere (Acts 8:4), even to the Gentiles.

Although the Christians do not exact revenge on the Jews for the murder of Jesus, this does not mean that there would be no recompense. We mean only that it is not up to the Christians to punish the Jews – justice demands revenge, but it is up to God to carry it out. As Paul writes, "Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord" (Romans 12:19). Or, as he writes in our passage, "In this way they always heap up their sins to the limit. The wrath of God has come upon them at last." The NLT renders the last part, "But the anger of God has caught up with them at last."

As to what Paul is referring to, several suggestions have been offered. Some of these refer to events that had already occurred as Paul writes this letter. Agabus predicted a famine, but it was one that would "spread over the entire Roman world," and did not specifically target the Jews (Acts 11:28). But this does not necessarily mean that it could not fit with what Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 2. Then, Josephus recorded a massacre of the Jews in the temple area. And Acts 18:2 says that Claudius had expelled all the Jews from Rome. Although Paul is possibly referring to these events, they appear rather mild

as an expression of "the wrath of God" that is meant to punish a group of people who has heaped up "their sins to the limit." Also, these events carry no clear connection to Paul's context in 1 Thessalonians 2. Thus they should give way if a better option is available.

The most obvious candidate is Jesus' prediction regarding the destruction of Jerusalem and the slaughter of the Jews.

"So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of the sin of your forefathers!

"You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell? Therefore I am sending you prophets and wise men and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town. And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. I tell you the truth, all this will come upon this generation.

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. "Do you see all these things?" he asked. "I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down." (Matthew 23:31-39, 24:1-2)

"So you testify that you approve of what your forefathers did; they killed the prophets, and you build their tombs. Because of this, God in his wisdom said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and others they will persecute.' Therefore this generation will be held responsible for the blood of all the prophets that has been shed since the beginning of the world, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, this generation will be held responsible for it all.

"The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within

your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you."

Some of his disciples were remarking about how the temple was adorned with beautiful stones and with gifts dedicated to God. But Jesus said, "As for what you see here, the time will come when not one stone will be left on another; every one of them will be thrown down." (Luke 11:48-51, 19:43-44, 21:5-6)

"Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey. When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit.

"The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. Last of all, he sent his son to them. 'They will respect my son,' he said.

"But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance.' So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

"Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?"

"He will bring those wretches to a wretched end," they replied, "and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time."

Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: 'The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes'?"

"Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed." (Matthew 21:33-44)

Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: "The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come.

"Then he sent some more servants and said, 'Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.'

"But they paid no attention and went off – one to his field, another to his business. The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city." (Matthew 22:1-7)

He then began to speak to them in parables: "A man planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a pit for the winepress and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey. At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants to collect from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. But they seized him, beat him and sent him away empty-handed. Then he sent another servant to them; they struck this man on the head and treated him shamefully. He sent still another, and that one they killed. He sent many others; some of them they beat, others they killed.

"He had one left to send, a son, whom he loved. He sent him last of all, saying, 'They will respect my son.'

"But the tenants said to one another, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.' So they took him and killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard.

"What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others. Haven't you read this scripture: 'The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes?'" (Mark 12:1-11)

Jesus turned and said to them, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. For the time will come when you will say, 'Blessed are the barren women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!' Then they will say to the mountains, 'Fall on us!' and to the hills, 'Cover us!' For if men do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?" (Luke 23:28-31)

Compare the above to what Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 2. He says (1) that the Jews murdered the prophets, (2) that the Jews murdered Jesus, and (3) that the Jews even now persecute the apostles of Christ. Persisting in such murderous rebellion, (4) they have heaped up their sins to the limit, so that (5) the wrath of God has finally come upon them. There are five items here, and they correspond to Jesus' prediction as well as his explanation in the above passages about the destruction of Jerusalem.

First, Jesus says that the Jews "killed the prophets." Second, they would kill the son of the vineyard. Third, they would kill the "prophets and apostles" that would be sent to them. Fourth, he says, "Fill up, then, the measure of the sin of your forefathers!" And fifth, he says that the judgment he pronounces would come upon "this generation" – including the very people that he faces as he speaks this, and the very people who would kill the apostles. He says, "Therefore this generation will be held responsible for the blood of all the prophets...Yes, I tell you, this generation will be held responsible for it all." The punishment that would visit them also corresponds to the self-curse that they inflicted on themselves as they pressured Pilate to crucify Jesus, saying, "Let his blood be on us and on our children!" (Matthew 27:25). Thus "this generation" applies to the people who lived at the time that Jesus made the prediction, and also to their children.

The nature of the judgment consists of the slaughter of the Jews and the destruction of Jerusalem, including the temple and their form of worship. As the parable says, "The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city." History tells us that this – exactly this – occurred in AD 70. The date, however, is unimportant for our purpose. Jesus said that it would happen, and that it would happen within one generation, even the same generation that murdered him, and that would murder his disciples. It was a prediction with a specific timeframe for its fulfillment. Because he said that it would happen, we know that it did happen. And the reason for it was to punish the Jews for the murder of the prophets, the Lord Jesus, and his apostles.

These items correspond exactly to what Paul is talking about in 1 Thessalonians 2. Therefore, it is likely that he is referring to this same incident that would happen, and did happen according to history in AD 70. That it has not occurred as he writes is irrelevant. He is saying that "at last" God will act. The Jews has sinned up to the limit, so that the verdict is passed, and their fate is sealed. Judgment is forthcoming. The language in the statement, "The wrath of God has come upon them at last," is very natural and consistent with this line of thinking. When the time came, God massacred the Jews for killing the prophets, killing the Lord Jesus, killing the apostles, and killing many other Christians. Now, will the Jews accuse the Christians for this? The Christians did not slaughter the Jews, but we can say, "The Romans did it," and this time we would be right.

There are some who insist that the wrath here refers to the future punishment of those who resist the gospel and impede its progress, namely, the judgment of God against them in hell. Although non-Christian Jews and Gentiles will certainly be sent to hell, I am unconvinced that Paul is referring to this in 1 Thessalonians 2. Nevertheless, if he is indeed referring to hell, then he would be stressing the point that the Jews deserve even greater punishment and more intense suffering than what they would endure in AD 70, and so he points to this final aspect of their fate.