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Recent Bibliography on the Trials of Jesus

John W. Welch and Matthew G. Wells

In recent years, numerous books and articles have been written about the arrest, accusation, interrogations, trials, mocking, and execution of Jesus. Many of the details about these procedures are insignificant when compared with the eternal consequences of the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Nevertheless, questions about the historicity and interpretation of the New Testament accounts continue to generate controversy in large part precisely because of their association with those culminating events in the mortal mission of Jesus. Since the scriptures and revelations leave many questions unanswered about the trials of Jesus, readers are left to sort through the data to understand their meaning as best as they can. As Elder Bruce R. McConkie has stated, “There is no divine ipse dixit, no voice from an archangel, and as yet no revealed latter-day account of all that transpired when God’s own Son suffered himself to be judged by men so that he could voluntarily give up his life upon the cross” (The Mortal Messiah [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981], 4:142).

Anyone striving to survey and assess the vast array of scholarly analysis and religious reflection that has been published on this topic in recent decades confronts a formidable task. In the end, final solutions to textual and historical problems will probably continue to elude us, especially concerning the questions of legal and moral accountability for the death of Jesus. But this outcome is undoubtedly what Jesus would have wanted: ultimately, no person or group should be blamed for the death of Jesus—an event that, from a Christian point of view, had to happen and that Jesus wanted and needed to happen. Consistent with his infinite mercy, the records

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about his death make it clear that responsibility was dispersed among several individuals and groups, Jews and Romans. Thus blame cannot be focused on anyone in particular.

The following bibliography classifies the major books and articles published in the last few decades that have dealt specifically with various legal dimensions of the trials of Jesus. Within each category, authors are listed alphabetically. Not mentioned are numerous textual commentaries on the New Testament gospels and the many basic works on the life of Christ.

Bibliography

Several studies cover the trials of Jesus in general and tend to recognize the joint complicity of Jews and Romans in the death of Jesus. Some of the main studies follow:


The following studies support or deal with the historicity and traditional interpretations of the New Testament accounts, which tend to place responsibility on the Jews.


Several recent insightful studies have argued particularly that the New Testament places culpability for the death of Jesus not on the Jews in general, but on only a small group of Jewish leaders:


Many publications, the most emphatic written by Jewish scholars in the 1960s and 1970s, have focused on the Roman laws relevant to the trial of Jesus and have tended to exonerate the Jews by arguing that the Romans were responsible for Jesus’s death:


Other studies have focused specifically on the nature of the various charges brought against Jesus, especially the charges of blasphemy, desecration of the temple, and political offenses against Rome:


Jensen, Ellis E. "The First Century Controversy over Jesus as a Revolutionary Figure." Journal of Biblical Literature 60 (1941): 261–72.


A few articles have scrutinized the legal and religious implications of the fact that Jesus was executed by crucifixion, which may have been a Jewish form of execution at the time of Jesus and not merely a Roman procedure:


The Barabbas incident in connection with Pilate's passing judgment against Jesus has evoked interesting historical and theological commentary:


Literary and theological studies have also yielded fruitful insights into the nature and purposes of the trial narratives in the Gospels:


