

QUESTION:

I don't see the rationale for [the Romans to crucify Jesus](#). It doesn't appear that he verbalized any anti-Roman propaganda nor was anything anti-Roman alluded to in Josephus's couple of lines on Jesus. Pilate probably didn't even know who Jesus was (possibly the bouncing back and forth between Herod was legend).

RESPONSE:

Yes, it's a great question and completely central to the story of Jesus: why was he crucified? First off, I agree the Herod story is almost certainly not historical. It's found only in Luke and is part of Luke's attempt to show that Pilate was innocent and wanted nothing to do with Jesus' execution (he tried to fob him off on the ruler of Galilee). Herod too finds him innocent. So if the ruling authorities aren't to blame, who is? It's those blasted Jews!

It would take an entire book to answer your question adequately, but I do want to say a couple of things about it. The crucifixion of Jesus by the Romans is one of the most secure facts we have about his life. Whenever anyone writes a book about the historical Jesus, it is really (really, really) important to see if what they say about his public ministry can make sense of his death. If not, then you have a problem. For example, if Jesus is best understood principally as a great rabbi who taught his followers they should love one another, and even love their enemies - why would the Romans execute him? (Oh no! We can't have you *loving* us! To the cross with you!) Or if Jesus were a Jewish cynic philosopher who taught his followers not to be invested in the material things of this world but to share what they have and be concerned only with spiritual things - what would make that a capital offense? (How many cynics were crucified?) Or if Jesus were principally interested in equality for women, or in having his followers adopt proto-Marxist principles or .. whatever - why was he killed? If a scholar tries to explain Jesus life in a way that really doesn't make much sense of his death, then that should be the first clue that something is amiss.

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