

WHO KILLED THE LORD? A DEFENSE AGAINST THE CHARGE OF ANTI -SEMITISM IN JOHN'S GOSPEL

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The background of Jesus was that of a typical Jewish boy. Jesus was born of Jewish parents in the homeland of the Jews. He was raised according to Jewish customs and dedicated in the temple (Luke 2:41-51). He passed into adulthood practicing his religion in words and deeds, and he regularly attended the synagogue. The teaching of Jesus is very Jewish in its content, and a person hearing it is struck with the authoritative demands presented in it (Mark 1 :22).

At the beginning of Christianity numbers of Jews accepted the claims and teaching of Jesus (Acts 2:41; 4:4). The earliest church was composed almost entirely of Jews. The idea of admitting Gentiles who had not initially converted to Judaism provoked a serious controversy in the church (Acts 15:1-35). The church later became chiefly Gentile, but a remnant of believing Jews always welcomed Jesus as Messiah and Lord (Rom 11:1-5).

Most of Jesus' nation rejected his claims. We find evidence of this rejection in the words of John: "He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him" (John 1:11). Acts closes with Paul describing the Jews as people whose "heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes" (Isa 6:10 quoted in Acts 28:27).

With the passing of nineteen hundred years the involvement of Jews in the Christian church has changed very little. The church today is predominantly Gentile, but we find a growing remnant of Jews. The last two hundred years have produced some remarkable developments among the Jews, and we see unusual evidence of this in our century.

The freeing of Jews from ghettos produced greater economic freedom for them. Despite some significant setbacks this century has seen a general diminishing of social prejudice against Jews. Animosity and prejudice have been replaced in many instances by growing trust and dialogue. One result of this new freedom has been a constructive study of Jesus by Jewish scholars.¹

The number of Jewish writers on the subject of Christianity has mushroomed in our century. Jewish publishing houses are increasingly producing materials dealing with Jesus and the Gospels.² Jewish writers demonstrate their own distinctive approach to the Gospels, but most Christians would take strong issue with their views.

Jewish scholars distinguish between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith. They view Christianity as the creation of the apostle Paul, who imported Hellenistic ideas and changed the message of Jesus. They show more interest in the teaching of Jesus than in his actions and claims. The familiarity of Jewish scholars with the Old Testament and with Jewish backgrounds of the Gospels equips them to share significant insights about the content of the Gospels. Most Christians see a deficiency in their approach, but Jewish scholars can provide assistance in understanding Jewish customs, culture, and mindset.

Contemporary Jewish approaches to the study of Jesus reflect the following general beliefs by Jewish scholars:

1. Jesus came to reform Judaism, not to bring teaching or ideas which were new.
2. The content of the Gospels reflects the theology of the early church and is not always a historically reliable source of information.
3. The Fourth Gospel and Paul are viewed as antithetical to Judaism. Many Jewish scholars do not give them a serious consideration.
4. The contact of Paul with Gentiles in spreading the gospel led him to form a new religion different from what Jesus had intended.³

The Jews in the Fourth Gospel

The Fourth Gospel uses the term "the Jews" (*Ioudaioi*) seventy times. The expression frequently occurs in a context to designate the

¹ Donald A Hagner, *The Jewish Reclamation of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 24. Hagner's survey of Jewish developments proved helpful in providing material for the summary of this section.

² The Jewish publishing house KTAV republished Claude Montefiore's work *The Synoptic Gospels* in 1968 (first published in 1909). The same publisher has joined with the Anti-Defamation League in reprinting Samuel Sandmel's *A Jewish Understanding of the New Testament* (original 1956; reprint 1974).

³ For additional discussion of these ideas see the chapter in Hagner, "The History of the Jewish Study of Jesus; 41-71.

opponents of Jesus.⁴ R. Bultmann provided a classic definition to this hostile use of the term when he said:

The term οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι, characteristic of the Evangelist, gives an overall portrayal of the Jews, viewed from the standpoint of Christian faith; as the representatives of unbelief (and thereby, as will appear, of the unbelieving "world" in general).⁵

Typical of a contemporary Jewish response to the Fourth Gospel is the article by M.J. Cook, Professor of Intertestamental and Early Christian Literature at Hebrew Union College.⁶ Cook indicates that for Jews "the nub of the problem. . . lies preeminently with one expression in John, namely, 'the Jews.'"⁷ He notes that the term "the Jews" appears only sixteen times in the Synoptics in contrast with the seventy in John's Gospel. Most of the usages in the Synoptics occur in relationship with the use of the phrase "king of the Jews," and the term does not normally denote the opponents of Jesus.

After examining John's use of the term "the Jews," Cook arrives at the conclusion that the usage does not "signify any specifically *pejorative* intent since in other words employing the term the intent is not necessarily denigrating of Jews."⁸ Why then did John use the term?

Cook concludes that John is not a historian, and thus we cannot look to the Fourth Gospel for a historically reliable account of the actual role of the Jews. He finds support for his view in the Fourth Gospel's usage of expressions describing Jesus, himself a Jew, talking with "the Jews" (John 10:24). He also sees differences between John's chronology and that of the Synoptics. The appearance of such data in the Fourth Gospel leads him to question John's historical reliability.

He suggests that John is primarily a theologian who has taken over the term *Ioudaioi* as a "symbol of unbelief or disbelief in the platform John is espousing."⁹ He feels that the designation of the Jews as unbelievers reflects the historical perspective from which the Fourth Gospel was written, a time when Gentile church membership was growing, and Jewish membership was not. John, according to Cook, used the symbol of *Ioudaioi* to picture unbelief or rejection of Christ, but we should not ascribe too much reality to the portrait. He states that "by virtue of John's literary license he has imputed to Jesus the Johannine theology and, insofar as Jesus is presented as the Christ and

⁴ Note, for example, the references to "the Jews" in 9:22; 10:31; and 19:7.

⁵ Rudolph Bultmann, *The Gospel of John* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971) 86.

⁶ Michael J. Cook, "The Gospel of John and the Jews," *Rev Exp* 84 (Spring 1987) 259-71.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 262.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 264.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 268.

insofar as in John the Christ and the Father are one, John has imputed his personal theology to God personally."¹⁰ For Cook the problem with John's use of the term "the Jews" is that it represents a faulty, erroneous theology.

Cook does consider John to be anti-Jewish, and he asks how Christians of today could deal with the anti-Jewishness of the Fourth Gospel so as to avoid offending the Jews. He suggests limiting the use of John in Christian lectionaries and pruning some of the more strident language of John into footnotes. He also suggests replacing the term *Ioudaioi* in some contexts with a synonym such as "Jesus' own people."¹¹ Cook concludes by saying that

John makes Jesus the only way to God, establishing for Christianity a monopoly on the truth, and excluding Judaism from access to God. . . . At the very least, Jews would wish for a deemphasizing of the Johannine view that "no one comes to the Father but by me" (John 14:6) in favor of the judgment that "in my Fathers house are many mansions" (John 14:2)!¹²

Cook's view that John sacrificed historical truthfulness to emphasize his theological viewpoint is a common approach to solving the problem of the usage of the term *Ioudaioi* in the Fourth Gospel.

Slightly different from Cook's view is the outlook of a Jewish scholar of the previous generation. S. Sandmel, late Professor of Bible and Hellenistic Literature at the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, Ohio, brands John's Gospel as anti-Semitic. He says, "Jesus in this Gospel often appears not to be a Jew and, on the other hand, John is widely regarded as either the most anti-Semitic or at least the most overtly anti-Semitic of the Gospels."¹³ Sandmel does suggest that the controversies in John "reflect not Jesus in his age but the ongoing bitterness between Jews and Christians that had accumulated in the intervening decades."¹⁴ Nevertheless, his concluding sentence in a chapter devoted to an examination of John is that "one cannot deny the existence of a written compilation of clearly expressed anti-Jewish sentiments."¹⁵ Sandmel recognizes that the term "Jews" is used in the Fourth Gospel with a variety of meanings, but he views the content of the Gospel as forthrightly anti-Semitic.

Cook and Sandmel present an interesting study in Jewish approaches to the Fourth Gospel. Both believe that the Gospel is anti-

¹⁰ Ibid., 270.

¹¹ Ibid., 269.

¹² Ibid., 270.

¹³ Samuel Sandmel, *Anti-Semitism in the New Testament?* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978) 101.

¹⁴ Ibid., 118.

¹⁵ Ibid., 119.

Semitic in its content, but they differ somewhat in their explanation of the evidence. Cook inclines more to question the faulty theology and the unreliable history of the Gospel. Sandmel views the writer as anti-Semitic and as reflecting the suspicions of a later generation of followers of Christ. Both Jewish spokesmen regard John's Gospel as deficient in its attitude toward the Jews.

The conviction that the Fourth Gospel is anti-Semitic is an idea firmly rooted in the minds of many who are not biblical scholars. The February 9, 1995 issue of the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette contained the story of an "educational and moral issue" at Swarthmore College. Several Jewish students objected to singing the German text of Bach's "St John Passion." The text comes from Luther's translation of John's Gospel. The protesters found John's frequent reference to Jesus' opponents as "Jews" unacceptable. Their dean supported their reluctance. However, one Jewish member of the chorus understood that the text was not spouting out anti-Semitic ideas but was expressing the Lutheran sense of guilt and original sin and had no objection to singing the words.¹⁶

A thorough analysis of the use of *Ioudaioi* in the Fourth Gospel appears in an article by Urban C. von Wahlde,¹⁷ Von Wahlde divides the Johannine usage of *Ioudaioi* into three categories. First, he notes a "hostile" usage in which the Jews "desire to kill him, to excommunicate him, to stone him, they accuse him of being possessed, of being a Samaritan, of blaspheming."¹⁸ He finds broad agreement among ten previous studies on this subject of the Jews in the Fourth Gospel. Writers of these studies generally agree in their identification of the passages in the Fourth Gospel which use the term "the Jews" in this hostile sense.

A second category of usage is designated by von Wahlde as "neutral." In this usage the writer has spoken of Jewish customs (2:6), Jewish people not showing hostility to Jesus (3:2-5), and the "king of the Jews" (18:33).¹⁹

His third usage sees the term *Ioudaioi* as a reference to the people (6:41, 52).²⁰ Van Wahlde suggests that the reference in 6:41, 52 is the only allusion to *Ioudaioi* in the Fourth Gospel which clearly describes the attitudes and opinions of the common people. He refers most of the seventy references to *Ioudaioi* in the Fourth Gospel to the religious authorities. Von Wahlde does not support the historical reliability

¹⁶ "In Addition to Which," *The Religion and Society Report* 12 (May 1995) 8.

¹⁷ Urban C. von Wahlde, "The Johannine 'Jews': A Critical Survey," *NTS* 28 (January 1982) 33-60.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 47.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 46.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 45.

of the Fourth Gospel, and he feels that redactional activity has occurred in the text.²¹

His suggested solution to the meaning of the term *Ioudaioi* has implications for the question of the possible presence of anti-Semitism in the Fourth Gospel. "The effect of von Wahlde's work is to narrow the scope of John's vilification from the people and the authorities to the authorities only."²² The unbelief and opposition in the Fourth Gospel thus become an effort more supported by the religious authorities than by the people as a whole.

Still another interesting study of the use of the term *Ioudaioi* in the Fourth Gospel has been prepared by M. Lowe. He gathers evidence from Jewish, Christian, and pagan sources to argue that "the general picture for the New Testament period is that the primary meaning of **Ἰουδαῖοι** was geographical."²³ He allows for the usage among Gentiles and Diaspora Jews of the secondary religious meaning for the term. Thus, the term *Ioudaioi* described "Judeans" in opposition to people living in other areas of Palestine. The term "Judea" itself could refer to (1) Judea in the strict sense, (2) the territory of Pontius Pilate including Idumea and Samaria, or (3) the kingdom of Herod the Great which approximated the entirety of the historic land of Israel.²⁴ He feels that John's Gospel speaks of "Judea only in the strict sense."²⁵

In defense of his position Lowe suggests that the references to feasts of the *Ioudaioi* occur in contexts requiring a trip to Judea. Whenever the context makes it clear that Jesus was already in Jerusalem, the words *heorte*, *pascha*, and other feast names "occur without any appendage."²⁶ Lowe questions the authenticity of the sole exception which he finds to this principle in 6:4.²⁷ Lowe interprets the phrase *basileus ton Ioudaion* to signify "King of the Judeans" (John 18:33).²⁸ In the instances where controversy develops between Jesus and the *ioudaioi* (10:19, 24, 31, 33; 11:45; 19:38) he finds clear reference to the Judeans. He contents that the rendering of "Judeans" is also the proper translation in 7:35; 9:22; 12:9, 11; and 13:33. He allows that John 4:9 uses the term *Ioudaioi* in the sense of "Jews in general" because this chapter reflects Samaritan usage.²⁹ He accepts that John 18:20 may re-

²¹ Ibid., 45.

²² R Alan Culpepper, "The Gospel of John and the Jews," *RevExp* 84 (Spring 1987) 274.

²³ Malcolm Lowe, "Who Were the **ἸΟΥΔΑΙΟΙ**?" *NovT* 18 (April 1976) 106.

²⁴ Ibid., 103.

²⁵ Ibid., 112.

²⁶ Ibid., 116.

²⁷ Ibid., 117.

²⁸ Ibid., 119.

²⁹ Ibid., 124-25.

fer to "Jews in general," but he suggests that Jews were Judeans in a wider sense, and the meaning may still be "Judeans."³⁰

Lowie insists that an understanding of the geographical usage of the term *Ioudaioi* in John's Gospel would prevent mistranslation and the pernicious practice of anti-Semitism. He feels that this error in translation has led to the practice of blaming the Jewish race for the death of Jesus (John 19:7) and imputing to them and their descendants the full responsibility for this act (Matt. 27:25).

R. Kysar finds anti-Semitism in the Fourth Gospel, but his method of finding it is more theological than exegetical.³¹ To Kysar "the text of the Gospel nurtures an anti-Semitism that is properly understood only in the light of the historical origin of the document."³² In a rapid literary analysis of the text of John's Gospel Kysar makes the following observations about its treatment of Jews and Judaism:

1. References to *Ioudaioi* in the Fourth Gospel show that the narrator is detached from Judaism, and the implied reader is thus distanced from an understanding of Judaism. Such expressions as 2:6 and 3:25 show the detachment of the narrator from Judaism.

2. The narrator presents the Jews as enemies of Jesus. Such passages as 2:18; 6:41; and 8:48 picture the Jews as opponents who will seek to kill him (5:16-18; 7:1).

3. The narrator presents the Jews as untrue to their own faith and tradition. They fail to observe the Torah (7:19), and they are truly the children of the devil (8:39-44).

4. The narrator presents an ambiguous picture of the Jews by occasionally showing them as admirers of Jesus (10:24) and even as believers (8:31; 11:45). Those mentioned in 8:31 eventually become Jesus' opponents, and those in 11:45 take actions to begin the death plot against Jesus. This ambiguity leads the readers to view the Jews as opponents of Jesus and his mission.

5. The presentation of Pilate as giving in to the plans of the Jewish leaders (18:31, 38-40; 19:4-8, 12-16) suggests that the Jews alone are responsible for the execution of Jesus.

³⁰ Ibid., 126, n. 79.

³¹ Robert Kysar, "Anti-Semitism and the Gospel of John," in *Anti-Semitism and Early Christianity*, ed. Craig A Evans and Donald A Hagner (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993) 113-27. Many scholars would differ with Kysar in his detection of anti-Semitism in John's Gospel. Donald Hagner defines anti-Semitism as racial hatred. He designates anti-Judaism as disagreement with the religious teaching of the Jews. Hagner finds anti-Judaism in the Fourth Gospel, but not anti-Semitism (see Hagner, *Jewish Reclamation . . .*, 289). We will frequently refer to this distinction between anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism in this article. Not all scholars make this distinct a variation between the terms. For one who seems to equate the two terms see Menahim Benhayim, "Alleged anti-Jewish Bias in the New Testament: A Response," *Bible Translator* (July 1994) 339.

³² Kysar, 114.

6. The narrator presents Judaism as inferior to the message of Jesus (4:21; 5:39, 45; 6:58). A true Israelite is one who becomes a disciple of Jesus (1:47).³³

Kysar notes after his survey that "the conclusion is inescapable that the text of the narrative nurtures a negative mentality toward Jews and Judaism."³⁴ What prompted the narrator to present Judaism in this light?

Kysar feels that the term *Ioudaioi* should be seen as pointing to certain Jewish leaders rather than to the entire Jewish people.³⁵ He feels that the Gospel was written "in response to the exclusion of the Johannine church from the synagogue and the subsequent dialogue between these two religious parties."³⁶ He suggests that the polemical stance of the Gospel is due to this expulsion. He feels that this polemical quality tells more about "the evangelist and the Johannine community than it witnesses to the ontological status of the Jews or Judaism."³⁷ He explains that "the vitriolic attack on Judaism is nothing more nor less than the desperate attempt of the Johannine Christians to find a rationale for their existence in isolation from Judaism."³⁸

F. Vouga also raises the issue of the presence of anti-Judaism in John's Gospel.³⁹ He approaches the issue largely from the standpoint of the historical background of John's Gospel rather than by making a complete exegetical examination of a term such as "the Jews." His conclusion is that

Die johanneische Christologie entwickelt sich innerhalb der jüdischen Tradition und in hermeneutischer Auseinandersetzung mit den Pharisäern, die die Synagoge angeblich kontrollieren. Von einem johanneischen Antijudaismus kann insofern nicht die Rede sein, als keine Gegenüberstellung Juden/Heiden, sondern eine Kontroverse innerhalb der jüdischen Überlieferung und innerhalb der Synagoge in der johanneischen Tradition stattfindet.⁴⁰

Since Vouga sees this debate as a discussion between Jews, he is unwilling to describe it with the adjective "anti-Jewish." The issues in

³³ Ibid., 114-17;

³⁴ Ibid., 117.

³⁵ Ibid., 118.

³⁶ Ibid., 120.

³⁷ Ibid., 122.

³⁸ Ibid., 122.

³⁹ F: Vouga, "Antijudaismus im Johannesevangelium," *Theologie und Glaube* 83, no. 1 (1993) 81-89.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 88. The author's translation is: "Johannine Christology develops within the Jewish tradition and in hermeneutical debate with the Pharisees, who putatively controlled the synagogue. The speech therefore cannot be from a Johannine anti-Judaism, since there was no Jewish/Gentile opposition, but rather a controversy occurred within the Jewish tradition and within the synagogue in the Johannine tradition."

John's Gospel revolve around a debate within Judaism itself between Christian Jews and those who have not responded to Christ.

A final insight dealing with the attitude toward Jews in the Fourth Gospel comes from the Bible translator R. Omanson.⁴¹ He asserts that NT scholars have "nearly universally conceded today" that the NT contains an anti-Jewish bias.⁴² Omanson offers four statements summarizing the opinions of contemporary scholars who attempt to counter this bias:

1. Christian scholars have given first-century Judaism a bad press.
2. Scholars today are learning to acknowledge the Jewishness of Jesus and are attempting to understand him in the context of first-century Judaism.
3. The gospel accounts of Jesus read back into the Gospels the conflicts of the early church with Pharisaic Judaism.
4. New studies on Paul are moving to picture him as other than the fierce opponent to Judaism which the church has long understood him to be.⁴³

Omanson suggests that NT scholars should attempt to bring these new understandings into their translations of John's Gospel. He suggests as an example the following note for John 8:44: "Many New Testament scholars consider the harsh language in this verse to reflect the violent debate between late first-century Judaism and the Christian community which produced the Fourth Gospel, over the issue of belief in Jesus as the Messiah and the Son of God."⁴⁴

How do these approaches to understanding the attitude of the Fourth Gospel toward the Jews assist us in approaching the text itself? Can we bring any of these understandings to the text in order to explain its usage of the term *Ioudaioi*? Some of these scholars are content merely to designate John's Gospel as anti-Semitic. Others see the effect of John's content as producing anti-Semitism, but they feel that the author is reading conflicts with Jews of his time back into the NT period. This writer remains dubious of the adequacy of most of these approaches because of the general suspicion of the historical reliability of John. It is not necessary to feel that the author of the Fourth Gospel harbors a blatant prejudice against the Jewish race. It is not

⁴¹ Roger Omanson, "Translationg the anti-Jewish Bias of the New Testament," *Bible Translator* 43 (July 1992) 301-13.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 301. Omanson does not clearly distinguish in this article between anti-Jewish and anti-Semitic. Although he never uses the term anti-Semitic in reference to NT content, he uses the term "anti-Semitic" in close proximity to the, term "anti-Jewish" so that one would easily get the impression that he equated the two practices. See his rejoinder to this criticism in a later article by him in *Bible Translator* 45 (July 1994) 342-43.

⁴³ Omanson, "Translating the Anti-Jewish Bias. . .," 302-5.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 309.

necessary to accept that John is reading events occurring during the period of writing the Fourth Gospel back into the events of Jesus' lifetime. It is not necessary to accept the view that John's theology has distorted his historical perspective.

In our next section, we will undertake a survey of relevant passages in John's Gospel related to the charge of anti-Semitism. We shall assume the historical reliability of John's Gospel after a few brief statements which support this view. Then we will study the various shades of meaning which Jesus has given to the term *Ioudaioi*.

An Exegetical Evaluation of the Fourth Gospel's Treatment of the Jews

Some who study the usage of the term *Ioudaioi* in the Fourth Gospel feel that the author is not using the term in reference to the people of Israel during the years from A.D. 30-33, but "of the opponents of his own time who denied the claims the Church makes about Jesus the Messiah."⁴⁵ Those who follow this approach feel that the author was reading the controversies of his own lifetime back into the earlier decades of the first century. This writer will assume that the author of John's Gospel has faithfully represented the events of A.D. 30-33 and has not rewritten history to reflect his own later experiences.

Several features of the Fourth Gospel assist in convincing this writer that John's historical accounts are trustworthy. First, John's own statement of purpose in 20:30-31 encourages our belief that the author has presented reliable information about Jesus Christ. If John's information were not trustworthy, readers would have no foundation for the belief which John professes to encourage. Second, John's frequent references to both topographical (John 1:28) and chronological facts (John 1:29, 35, 43) encourage a belief that he is concerned about the historical accuracy of his writing. Third, John's emphasis on "witness" (John 19:35; 21:24) suggests that he is presenting information capable of being relied on. For additional information supporting the reliability of history in the Fourth Gospel see the author's paper "The Reliability of History in John's Gospel."⁴⁶

Assuming that we can rely on the author's accurate representation of the events of A.D. 30-33, how did he use the term *Ioudaioi*? Sometimes the author used the term as an ethnic expression, referring to

⁴⁵ Robert G. Bratcher, "The Jews' in the Gospel of John," *Bible Translator* 26 (October 1975) 403. Brown follows the same approach as seen in his statement that "in the Fourth Gospel, then, the evangelist uses the term with the meaning that it had in his own time." See Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John, I-XII*, AB (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966) LXXII.

⁴⁶ Thomas D. Lea, "The Reliability of History in John's Gospel," *JETS* 38 (Sept., 1995) 387-402.

the Jewish people (5:1). Here we see no pejorative significance from the word, and often the usage reflects a quite positive evaluation of the Jews (4:22). A second usage appears as a reference to people who live in Judea (11:19). In this usage the term sometimes refers to people who are hostile to Jesus (11:8) and on other occasions to those who have responded favorably to Jesus (11:45). We may designate this as a geographical usage. In a third usage the author employed the term to describe people who were hostile to Jesus (8:48). These were not religious authorities, but people or groups of people who opposed the words or deeds of Jesus. The fourth usage of the term spotlights the authorities in Jerusalem (1:19; 18:31). These authorities do not always openly express a hostile response to Jesus, but it is normally easy to recognize that the activities of these "Jews" are contrary to Jesus. We will examine each of the seventy usages of the term *Ioudaioi* in John's Gospel in order to determine the category into which the usage fits.⁴⁷

The Ethnic Usage

The ethnic usage of the term *Ioudaioi* identifies a practice or a person as Jewish in background. Some of the references present a clearly positive picture of the Jewish people (4:22). Others are primarily ethnic in their intent, but they convey a sense of opposition to Jesus (18:12).

The reference in 2:6 is clearly ethnic because it identifies the purification of the water as following the custom of Jewish laws and regulations. The phrase "passover of the Jews" in 2:13 has no hostility in its usage. Carson explains this usage by pointing out that both Galileans and diaspora Hebrews called residents of Judea "Jews." Because the Passover was celebrated in the temple in Judea, it was natural to refer to it as the "passover of the Jews."⁴⁸

The reference of 3:1 is ethnic because it identifies Nicodemus as a member of the Jewish ruling council. In 3:25 the author refers to a discussion between John's disciples and "a" Jew. The term may have been used because the Jew who engaged in the debate was himself a Judean. John's disciples may well have been in Judea when the discussion of 3:25 occurred. The statement of 3:26 suggests that John's disciples may well have been away from John for the discussion and could have come to him from some location in Judea. It is easier to designate the usage in 3:25 as ethnic than to consider that it appropriately fits into another category.

⁴⁷ Bratcher, 409. The author of this paper is indebted to Robert Bratcher for his clear analysis of the usage of *Ioudaioi* in the Fourth Gospel. Although I have not copied his categories nor completely adopted his interpretations, I have found his insights to be helpful.

⁴⁸ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991) 176.

The term *Ioudaios* appears twice in 4:9. The first usage in 4:9 comments that Jesus is ethnically Jewish. The second usage in 4:9 indicates either that ethnic Jews do not associate with Samaritans or that they do not use the dishes which Samaritans have used. In either translation the term *Ioudaios* has an ethnic connotation. The positive statement about the Jews in 4:22 suggests that God's revelation has emerged through the Jewish people. Brown says, this line is a clear indication that the Johannine attitude to the Jews cloaks neither an anti-Semitism of the modern variety nor a view that rejects the spiritual heritage of Judaism."⁴⁹

The reference in 5:1 designated the feast under discussion as Jewish religious custom. Since the event occurred in Jerusalem, it was natural to designate it as a Jewish feast. The designation in 6:4 described the feast as the Jewish passover. The reference in 7:2 identified Tabernacles as a Jewish feast.

The reference in 11:55 resembles the usage of 2:13; 5:1; 6:4; and 7:2. The choice of the term "Jews" or "Jewish" was made for reasons similar to those explained for 2:13.

The designation in 18:12 refers to the Jews as officials sent to arrest Jesus in conjunction with Roman soldiers. In 18:3 the author's usage of the term "detachment of soldiers" suggested that Roman auxiliaries accompanied the Jewish officials and police.⁵⁰ The reference to the "Jewish officials" in 18:12 is probably primarily an ethnic designation to distinguish them from the Romans who were a part of the group. They are clearly Jewish officials who oppose Jesus.

The statement of 18:35 is an ethnic reference used by Pilate. He was stating that since he was not a Jew, he had no interest in the royal claims which any ethnic Jew would make.

The references to Jews in 19:21, 40, and 42 are all ethnic in their intent. In 19:21 the speakers are the Jewish chief priests. In 19:40 our author indicated that the burial of Jesus took place in accordance with Jewish custom. In 19:42 he referred to Jesus' day of burial as the Jewish day of Preparation.

One final grouping of ethnic references in the Fourth Gospel revolves around the usage of the term "king of the Jews." This is a reference to the Jewish Messiah. The phrase appears five times in the Fourth Gospel. In 18:33, 39 Pilate used the designation in reference to Jesus. In 19:3 the soldiers used it in reference to Jesus. In 19:19 Pilate ordered that the phrase be written and displayed above the cross. In 19:21 the chief priests protested against its use on the cross by Pilate.

⁴⁹ Brown, 172.

⁵⁰ Carson, 577.

The Geographical Usage

A second category of usage of the term *Ioudaioi* in the Fourth Gospel is to designate the residents of Judea. This usage focuses primarily on those people who live in and near Jerusalem. Many of these references have very positive overtones in reference to the Jews. This positive usage provides additional evidence against the idea that the author of the Fourth Gospel was deliberately anti-Semitic.

Many of these geographical references are clustered in John 11. In 11:7 Jesus suggested to his disciples that they return to Judea. In 11:8 the disciples warned Jesus that the Jews had earlier tried to stone him (10:31, 39). This reference points clearly to the Jews in Judea, a geographical reference. The usage also shows that these particular Jews were among the opponents of Jesus, for they represent people who were hostile to Jesus.

In 11:19, 31, 33, 36, 45 the term "Jews" refers to those who came to Mary and Martha to comfort them after the death of Lazarus. Some of these came to faith in Jesus (11:45). The fact that those who came to Mary and Martha are numbered as "many" suggests that the family of Mary and Martha was prominent in Jerusalem. The author does not discuss the depth of the faith of those who "put their faith in him" (11:45). We would recognize that their faith was deeper than the faith of those who went to the Pharisees and tattled about Jesus. All of these references present positive statements about the Jews.

In 11:54 the term "Jews" still refers to those who live in Judea, for the author contrasts these Jews who live in Jerusalem with those individuals who reside in the city of Ephraim. Carson locates Ephraim as twelve miles from Jerusalem,⁵¹ and it is certainly likely that some of the Judean "Jews" resided in the area. However, Jesus was far enough distant from Jerusalem that the use of the term "Jews" in reference to hostile Jerusalemites would not apply to those in Ephraim. The hostile Jews were those in the area of Jerusalem, and Jesus had removed some distance from these.

In 12:9, 11 Jesus has returned to Bethany in the vicinity of Jerusalem. The Jews who came out to see Jesus in this location were likely Judeans, largely from Jerusalem. The references to *Ioudaioi* in this pair of verses contain no negative overtones. We read that "many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and putting their faith in him" (12:11). These Jews are also to be distinguished from the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem, who normally showed unrestricted animus against Jesus.

⁵¹ Carson, 424. Bratcher suggests that we do not know where "Ephraim" was located, and he favors the idea that it was in Perea and not in Judea. See Bratcher, 407.

The "Jews" of 19:20 were those who read the title which Herod had placed above Jesus' cross. These clearly appear to be Judeans, and they lived in and near Jerusalem. We should distinguish these Jews from the Jerusalem authorities, who are also designated as "Jews" in 19:38.

This geographical usage of the term "Jews" presents a generally positive picture of the Jews although its primary usage is to designate the group as residents of Judea near Jerusalem. The reference in 11:8 is the sole clearly negative reference to the Jews. Although those in 11:8 are clearly Judean residents, we should distinguish their spiritual orientation from that of those Jews mentioned in 11:19, 31, 33, 36, 45.

Hostile People

Jesus received hostility from many different people and groups. We are not always able to determine clearly the identity of the opponents, but we can often recognize that they may be either ordinary individuals who are hostile or authority figures who are hostile. In this section we will observe examples of individual people who are hostile to Jesus. In our next section we will observe examples of authority figures who demonstrate this same hostility.

The *Ioudaioi* in 6:41, 52 are probably the synagogue congregation in Capernaum (6:59). Jesus' claim that he is the bread from heaven has incensed them. They regard him as a fellow Galilean (6:42), and they are outraged at his claims. Bratcher points out that it is reasonable to identify "the Jews" with "the crowd" (6:22) and that the author used the term *Ioudaioi* when it became clear that they were contesting the claims of Jesus.⁵² The fact that this incident occurred in Galilee makes it unlikely that these are Jerusalem authorities.

The reference to the Jews in 8:22, 31, 48, 52, 57 is to individuals in Judea who were hostile to Jesus. The hostility is not clearly evident in 8:22, 31, but it becomes apparent as the discussion develops in 8:48, 52, 57. Bratcher feels that the reference in 8:22 must be to authorities because the statement of 8:28 about "lifting up the Son of Man" would not have been made to the people as a group.⁵³ The cries of the people as a group played as large a role in the death of Jesus as did the machinations of the authorities (see Luke 23:13,18-21; Mark 15:11). This fact provides a basis for feeling that the reference to *Ioudaioi* in 8:22 is to hostile people.

⁵² Bratcher, 405. Brown shows a suspicion of the historical reliability of the Fourth Gospel at this point by suggesting that the objections of 6:41 have "been introduced here from another scene" (see Brown, 270).

⁵³ Bratcher, 406.

Carson points out that the faith displayed by the "Jews" of 8:31 is a fickle faith.⁵⁴ In the verses which follow, Jesus declared that endurance in obedience distinguished those with a fickle faith from those with an enduring faith (8:32-36). The actions of these Jews in 8:48, 52, 57 shows that they do not have an enduring faith. Brown suggests that a later redactor added 8:31 and felt that it was reasonable to make "Jews" the audience for what followed. He, according to Brown, saw no contradiction in describing these believers as "Jews."⁵⁵

In 10:19, 24, 31, 33 the term *Ioudaioi* refers to a crowd of people showing their hostility to Jesus. The hostility shown in wanting to stone Jesus (10:31) and the attempt to seize him (10:39) appear to be the reaction of an impatient crowd of people, not the scheming response of authorities who held some authority in their hands.

The references of 18:20, 38 describe people who are hostile to Jesus. The fact that the "Jews" of 18:20 are those who come together at the synagogues or the temple makes it more likely that these are people rather than authorities. The designation of the "Jews" in 18:38 probably includes some of the authorities supplemented by vocal supporters from the people. Such a passage as Mark 15: 11 indicates that the crowd was not composed merely of Jewish authorities opposed to Jesus.

Hostile Authorities

Pressure from the Jerusalem Jewish authorities was a chief factor in securing the death of Jesus. The weak-willed complicity of Pilate in refusing to reject their requests suggests that the death of Jesus can be attributed both to Jewish and Roman leaders. We should not follow the logic of the request of the Jewish crowd in Matthew 27:25 and permit the death of Jesus to be blamed exclusively on the Jews. In 1:19 those Jews who sent priests and Levites to inquire of John were probably leaders of the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem. In 1:24 the author identified them as Pharisees.

The Jews of 2:18, 20 are the authorities who had challenged Jesus after he had expelled the animals from the Court of the Gentiles in the Temple. Those Jews appearing in 5:10, 15, 16, 18 were those who informed the healed man that carrying his mat on the Sabbath was wrong. When they later talked with Jesus, his claim that he had a special relationship with the Father riled them. These appear to be Jewish authorities from Jerusalem.

The Jews of 7:1, 11, 13, 15, 35 are the authorities in Jerusalem. The reference in 7:1 seems clearly to describe the authorities because

⁵⁴ Carson, 347-48.

⁵⁵ Brown, 354-55.

of the prior statement about the authorities in 5:18. The statements of 7:11, 13 appear as references to the authorities because the "people" are afraid to speak of Jesus for fear of the "Jews." Since it is the people who are afraid to speak in 7:13, it must be that they fear the Jewish authorities. It is also the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem who are surprised at his teaching (7:15). In 7:35 those who ask where Jesus is going may well be the guards sent out as representatives of the authorities (7:32). The reference in 7:35 is particularly difficult because it is entirely possible that these "Jews" were the authorities themselves or that the term refers to the people. The puzzlement lying beneath the question of 7:35 seems more to belong to the mentality of a crowd of Jewish people than to the more suave, knowledgeable authorities.

The references in 9:18, 22 designate the Jerusalem authorities. In 9:13 they are identified as the Pharisees. They press forward relentlessly in their opposition to Jesus.

The statements of Jesus about the Jews in 13:33 may well refer back to the words of 7:34. It appears that Jesus is speaking to the authorities in the earlier reference, and it seems suitable to envision the same audience here.

The references of 18:14, 31, 36 designate the authorities of Jerusalem. Note the discussion of the reference of 18:12 under the ethnic usage of the term. The usage in 18:12 is probably ethnic because it distinguishes the officers of the Jews from the group of Romans who went with them to arrest Jesus. The advice which Caiaphas gave in 18:14 is clearly to the Jewish authorities. In 18:31, 36 first Pilate and then Jesus referred to the Jewish authorities. It is more likely that those who answered the objections of Pilate in 18:31 are Jewish authorities. It is also more likely that Jesus was speaking of being delivered to the Jewish authorities. In 18:38 some of the people who supported the authorities joined with them in calling for Jesus' death.

The references in 19:7, 12, 14, 31, 38 describe the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem. Bratcher contends that those of 19:7, 12, 14 are still part of the crowd which was hostile to Jesus.⁵⁶ The responses in 19:7, 12 sound more like the responses and accusations of Jewish authorities than expressions from the people. It is entirely possible that the group of Jews in 19:14 may contain people hostile to Jesus as well as the authorities. Those who request the body of Jesus in 19:31 would most likely be the authorities. The "Jews" of 19:38 are also the Jewish authorities. It is interesting to observe in this verse that Joseph of Arimathea himself is ethnically a Jew. The author distinguished him

⁵⁶ Bratcher, 408.

from those Jews of whom he was afraid. It seems highly unlikely that a writing that allows usages such as this contains racial prejudice against the Jewish race. The author does point out the opposition of the Jewish leaders to Jesus, and we should not fault him for attempting to display truthfully their opposition.

The Jews of 20:19 are the same authorities whom Joseph of Arimathea feared in 19:38. This same usage had also appeared in 7:13.

The usage in this section is frequently described as anti-Semitic by scholars convinced that John has traced the opposition of the Jews to Jesus in deliberately stark colors. It appears that all which the author has done is to point out the consistent opposition of the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem to the preaching and practices of Jesus. This practice does not demonstrate racial prejudice against the Jews. It does show opposition to the theological positions of the Jewish leaders, and it is proper to call it anti-Jewish.⁵⁷

The Historical Answer

Contemporary scholarship may debate the role of the Jews in the death of Jesus, but plenty of historical evidence exists to prove either Jewish involvement in the crucifixion or Jewish opposition to Christians. Three chief sources corroborate Jewish participation in these activities.

The first witness to Jewish attitudes toward Christians appears in the Jewish historian Josephus. After the death of the Roman procurator Festus (Acts 24:27), Nero appointed Albinus as new procurator. He also gave the Jewish high priesthood to the Sadducee Ananus. While Albinus was en route to assume his office, Ananus convened the Jewish Sanhedrin in order to condemn James (Acts 15:12-21; Jas 1:1), Jesus' half brother, to death. Josephus reported the story in these words:

Festus was now dead, and Albinus was but upon the road; so he assembled the sanhedrim of judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others (or, some of his companions); and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned.⁵⁸

The church historian Eusebius quotes the church father Hegesippus (second century) in defense of the fact that Christianity was the charge brought against James.⁵⁹ The attitude of the high priest Ananus dramatically echoes the opposition of the high priest Caiaphas in the

⁵⁷ See note 31 for a distinction between the term “anti-Semitic” and “anti-Jewish”

⁵⁸ Josephus *Antiquities* 20.9.1.

⁵⁹ Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 2.23.

gospels (John 11:49-53). Josephus provides evidence from a Jewish source for the intensity of the opposition to Christ. Such opposition a generation after Christ's death should make us hesitant to excise references to Jewish opposition to Jesus which appear in the Gospels.

A second source demonstrating Jewish opposition to Jesus appears in the writings of early church fathers. Tertullian described the Jewish opposition which led to Jesus' death in the following words:

But the Jews were so exasperated by His teaching, by which their rulers and chiefs were convicted of the truth, chiefly because so many turned aside to Him, that at last they brought Him before Pontius Pilate, at that time Roman governor of Syria; and, by the violence of their outcries against Him, extorted a sentence giving Him up to them to be crucified.⁵⁰

In addition to the words of Tertullian we also find similar ideas repeated in Justin Martyr. Justin indicated that the opposition to Jesus which appeared among the Jews in Christ's time also remained among Jews of his own time. Justin said,

For other nations have not inflicted on us and on Christ this wrong to such an extent as you have, who in very deed are the authors of the wicked prejudice against the Just One, and us who hold by Him. For after that you had crucified Him, the only blameless and righteous Man,-through whose stripes those who approach the Father by Him are healed,-when you knew that he had risen from the dead and ascended to heaven, as the prophets foretold He would, you not only did not repent of the wickedness which you had committed, but at that time you selected and sent out from Jerusalem chosen men through all the land to tell that the godless heresy of the Christians had sprung up, and to publish those things which all they who knew us not speak against us.⁵¹

It is of course possible that scholars may dismiss the statements from Tertullian and Justin by designating them as hopelessly anti-Semitic. Those who would do this are trying to rewrite history instead of interpreting it as it appears in documents of the times.

A third source of information about Jewish attitudes toward Jesus possibly appears in the Babylonian Talmud. Certainty about the references to Jesus is difficult because scholars debate whether there are actual references to Jesus in this material.⁵² Tractate Sanhedrin uses the name Yeshu in probable reference to Jesus and indicates that he had five disciples, each deserving to die. The tractate notes that Yeshu was put to death on Passover Eve for the practice of magic and the decep-

⁵⁰ Tertullian *Apology* 21.

⁵¹ Justin Martyr *Dialogue with Trypho* 17.

⁵² Hagner, *Jewish Reclamation*, 46.

tion of Israel. Prior to his death authorities had issued a plea for anything to be spoken in his favor. No response was given to the plea.⁶³

Scholars do not accept the references as thoroughly reliable in the historical accounts. The material is important because it reflects the Jewish attitude of the late Talmudic periods. This distaste probably developed over the centuries, and we may feel confident that the attitude could have reflected first-century attitudes toward Jesus.

It is also important to point out the anti-Jewish attitudes in some sections of the OT. We should be careful to define anti-Jewishness as opposition to Jewish religious practices and not as prejudice against the Jews as a race. The historical writer of 2 Chron 36:11-16 recorded accurately the Jewish opposition to the messages of the prophets. The prophet Isaiah described his people as those "loaded with guilt" who had "forsaken the Lord" (Isa 1:4). Later he pictured them as "rebellious; "deceitful; and "unwilling to listen to the Lord's instruction" (Isa 30:9). The words of Jeremiah corroborate the picture painted by Isaiah. (Jer 3:6; 7:25-26; 11:7-8; 18:23). The OT prophets were quick to point out the stubborn resistance of the Jewish people to messages from Jehovah. The words of Josephus, the early church fathers, and even the words of the Babylonian Talmud substantiate this picture. A rejection of the NT picture of Jewish opposition to Jesus and to Christians seems to represent a tampering with the historical evidence. This evidence presents a consistent pattern of Jewish opposition to Christians and to Jesus.

The Conclusion

Who is responsible for the death of the Lord? Should we exculpate the Jews for Jesus' death because of alleged anti-Semitism in the gospels? Should we allow our present sympathy for the victims of the Nazi Holocaust to influence our interpretation of the NT evidence?

In answering these questions in reverse order we should give a resounding "No!" to the second and third questions. Those who have followed through this paper should recognize that this writer has disputed the charge of anti-Semitism in the gospels. It is admitted that the gospel writers do show opposition to the unbelief and resistance of the Jews of Jesus' time to Christians and to Christ himself. This admission represents the acceptance of the gospel portraits of the Jews as historically accurate.

Who then killed the Lord? There is a sense in which the sins of all sinners contributed to the death of Jesus, but that is not the sense

⁶³ b. Sanh. 43a.

in which this writer has asked the question. We can develop an answer to the question as we observe the following principles:⁶⁴

1. The idea of Jewish collective guilt for Jesus' death is totally inaccurate. Jewish participation in the events of Jesus' passion should not be used as a basis for explaining the death of Jews during the Holocaust.

2. It is also improper to apply the idea of collective guilt even to the generation of Jews contemporary with Jesus. Not all Jews of Jesus' lifetime sought the death of Jesus.

3. The Gospels accurately show that Jesus had his opponents among the Jews, and we can assume that a crowd did shout, "Crucify! Crucify!" Those who made this cry seem to have been "a group perfectly orchestrated by Jesus' priestly adversaries to demand the release of Barabbas instead."⁶⁵

4. Jesus also had friends among the Jews, and most of these seem to have been absent from the proceedings of his arrest, hearings, and trial until it was too late. Some did get the message about Jesus' conviction, and Luke reports that "a large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him" (Luke 23:27). It is also important to remember the 120 Jewish Christians before Pentecost (Acts 1:15); the 3000 Jewish converts at Pentecost (Acts 2:41); the 5000 who soon appeared (Acts 4:4); and the many Jewish priests who became believers (Acts 6:7). Paul spoke of a "remnant" of the Jews living in his day (Rom 11:5).

5. References to "the Jews," particularly in the Fourth Gospel, have at least four obvious meanings as proposed in the exegetical section of this paper. Not all Jews opposed Jesus, but some, particularly those influenced by the high priestly families, stubbornly sought his death (Luke 23:13,21). We should not brand the Fourth Gospel as anti-Semitic for similarly using the plural "the Jews." On the other hand, we should not allow this "in-house" usage among Jews to lead those of us who are Gentiles to make pejorative conclusions against the Jews.⁶⁶

6. We should not view the statement of Matt 27:25 as a wish by the Jews but rather as a statement by those Jews who were present to accept responsibility for Jesus' death. It goes beyond the biblical statement to press these words into a basis for an eternal curse on the Jewish people. Matthew may have included these words so that his

⁶⁴ Many of these ideas are developed from Paul L. Maier, "Who Killed Jesus?" *Christianity Today*, 9 (April 1990) 17-19.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

readers could "understand that the loss of Israel's special status. . . is to be interpreted in the light of their rejection of Jesus."⁶⁷

7. The words of the gospel writers are neither explicit citations nor fabrications. They represent "the living and powerful words of Jesus in a fresh way for his readers, while faithfully and accurately presenting the 'gist' of what Jesus said."⁶⁸ Luke's statements in 1:1-4 suggest that the gospel writers had a concern for accuracy, and most Jews exercised great care in passing on divinely associated events from one generation to another. We should realize that an accurate summary of Jesus' teaching is fully as reliable as his actual words.

Is it anti-Semitic to suggest that the Jews of Jesus' lifetime vigorously opposed his teaching and his work? If we realize that the Jews who opposed Jesus represented an elite group among NT Jews, we are not showing a pejorative attitude toward the Jews as a race by merely pointing out this fact.

Is it anti-Jewish to suggest that the Jews of the first century and of this century hold attitudes toward Jesus Christ with which Christians would almost universally disagree? If we define anti-Jewishness as indicating our differences with the Jewish religion, Christians would only be stating their beliefs by demonstrating how they differ from first-century and contemporary Jews. One contemporary Jewish believer has explained his views in this way:

The fact remains, that for many believing Christians, neither the Orthodox Judaism of the New Testament era nor of our own era can be the ultimate word of God for anyone convinced of the uniqueness of Jesus Christ. It is not necessarily anti-Jewish to hold such a position.⁶⁹

Were the Jews involved in the death of Jesus? Yes, but we can also say that the Romans were involved in his death (John 19:15-16). The truth is that both Jewish and Roman participation led to the death of Jesus. The admission of this fact is not an evidence of anti-Semitism, but it represents an effort to accept the trustworthiness and reliability of the Gospels.

⁶⁷ R T. France, *Matthew*, TCNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985) 393.

⁶⁸ Darrell L. Bock, "The Words of Jesus in the Gospels: Live, Jive, or Memorex?" *Jesus Under Fire* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995) 77. Bock's article contains excellent additional information defending the trustworthiness of the gospel accounts of Jesus' life.

⁶⁹ Menahim Benhayim, "Alleged anti-Jewish Bias in the New Testament: A Response;" *Bible Translator* 45 (July 1994) 340.

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