

TEN QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT *The Passion of the Christ*

The 2004 movie produced by Mel Gibson, *The Passion of the Christ*, is one of the most popular and controversial films of our time. These questions will help in thinking through the movie, or in discussing it with others.

1. Do you know *why* Jesus had to die?

When learning from *The Passion of the Christ* the facts about Jesus' suffering and crucifixion, it's essential to understand the reason for it. One of the most important of the many reasons given in the Bible why Jesus had to die was to receive the wrath of God in the place of others. "For all have sinned," God says in Romans 3:23. And because God is just and holy, He must punish those who have sinned. But because He is also loving, He was willing to send His Son—Jesus—to take the hammer blow of His wrath so that others might receive His mercy. When Jesus allowed Himself to be spiked onto that wooden cross, He was accepting God's curse so that sinners could receive God's blessings forever. As Galatians 3:13 puts it, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.'"

2. Do you know who really killed Jesus?

There is no single, earthly source to blame for killing Jesus. The Jewish religious leaders hated Jesus, so they arrested Him and delivered Him to the Roman official, Pontius Pilate, for execution. He could have released Jesus, but Pilate, too, shares responsibility because he succumbed to the influence of yet a third party who contributed to the death of Jesus, the crowd in Jerusalem who kept shouting, "Crucify Him!" (Matthew 27:23). In the end, however, it was sinners like me and you who killed Jesus. "While we were yet sinners," the apostle Paul tells us, "Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). No one can point a finger at any other person or group for the death of Jesus. Our sins were the reason Jesus had to be crucified.

3. Do you understand the role that God the Father played in the death of Jesus?

Ultimately, it was God the Father who killed His Son, Jesus. The Bible clearly says that Jesus was "delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23). Jesus did not die by

mistake. Although our sins made Jesus' death necessary, God brought it to pass. So in God's sending Jesus to receive His wrath so others could receive eternal life, sinners are saved *from* God, *by* God.

4. Do you realize why Jesus' death was different from the death of everyone else in history?

The death of Jesus was unique because His life was unique. Since Jesus never sinned, He never *had* to die; rather He *chose* to die. And because Jesus never broke the law of God, He could die as a substitute in the place of lawbreakers. As 2 Corinthians 5:21 explains, God the Father "made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (2 Corinthians 5:21).

5. Do you know why Jesus cried from the cross, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46)?

When God in His justice laid the crushing guilt of sinners upon Jesus, God in His holiness then had to reject His own Son as though he were a sinner. As Jesus was suspended between earth and Heaven, the prophecy of Isaiah 53:10 was fulfilled: "But the Lord was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief if He would render Himself as a guilt offering."

6. Do you know why Jesus' last words were, "It is finished" (John 19:30)?

Because of His love, God sent Jesus to be the propitiation—the wrath-taker—for the sins of people who did not yet love Him. "In this is love," says 1 John 4:10, "not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." Once He had taken our guilt and God's punishment, Jesus triumphantly declared to His Father, "It is finished," and died.

7. Do you see the relationship between Jesus' death and His resurrection?

The resurrection of Jesus vindicates all His claims. Anyone could claim, as Jesus did, to be the only way to God (John 14:6). But Jesus substantiated this and all His other claims by doing something no one else has ever done—rising from the dead, never to die again. Moreover, by not leaving Jesus in the grave, God showed that He accepted His Son's death as a substitute for the death of others. The Bible is plain that the cross of Jesus, without the resurrection, would have meant, "your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins" (1 Corinthians 15:17). "But

now Christ has been raised from the dead" (1 Corinthians 15:20), as proof that Jesus' death in the place of sinners satisfied the requirements of God's justice.

8. Do you realize what the death of Jesus can do for you that you cannot do for yourself?

First among many things His cross alone can do for you is this: the death of Jesus can make you righteous in the sight of God. No amount of good that we do can atone for our sins or earn us a place in Heaven. And if we die without receiving the benefits of Jesus' death, the wrath of God will fall on us forever. Conversely, the Bible speaks of those who have experienced the benefits of the cross as those who have "been justified by His blood," and declares that they "shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him" (Romans 5:9). To be "justified" means more than having all sins forgiven. It also means to be given credit for living the perfect life Jesus lived. Only a perfect life earns entrance into a perfect world with a perfect God. And only through the *death* of Jesus can we get the perfect *life* of Jesus that we need to enter heaven.

9. Do you understand the central message of this movie?

Jesus Christ, the sinless Son of God, was crucified as a substitute for sinners, and rose from the dead to be King over everyone and everything forever.

10. Do you know the biblical response to the message of *The Passion of the Christ*?

It's summarized in one of the best-known and best-loved verses in the Bible: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

Many people will have deep, but merely temporary, emotional responses to *The Passion of the Christ*. Instead, may the Lord grant you to find in the greatest evil ever committed—the death of Jesus—the greatest, richest, and most satisfying blessing ever offered—God Himself.