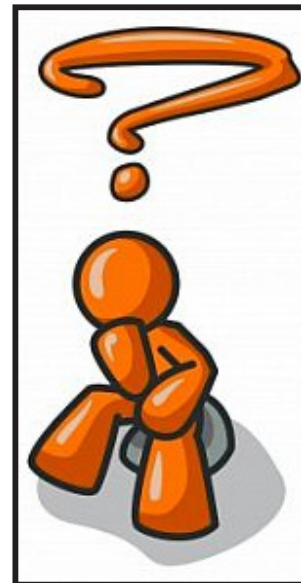


# What About...the Book "Killing Jesus"?

BY CLARK BLANCHARD

Recently, Fox News anchor and syndicated newspaper columnist Bill O'Reilly and historian Martin Dugard added "Killing Jesus" to their very popular book series, "Killing Lincoln" and "Killing Kennedy." So, from a biblical perspective, what about this very popular book, "Killing Jesus"?

"Killing Jesus" claims to be an historical record, not a theological book. Although both authors are Roman Catholic, neither claims to be theologians. They write, "We are historical investigators and are interested primarily in telling the truth about important people, not converting anyone to a spiritual cause.... To understand what Jesus accomplished and how he paid with his life, we have to understand what was happening around him. His was a time when Rome dominated the Western world and brooked no dissent. Human life was worth little. Life expectancy was less than forty years, and far less if you happened to anger the Roman powers that were" (pp. 2-3).



Killing Jesus provides a widened historical context for the Gospel accounts. Again, they write, "So researching "Killing Jesus" required a plunge into classical works such as the four Gospels and the Jewish historian Josephus. These sources provided a jumping-off point, giving us the basis, and then demanded new levels of deeper research to tell the story in as much detail as possible" (pp. 275-76).

This wider context for the Gospel record includes a more in-depth understanding of the Roman Empire, its philosophy of survival through brutality, and its appalling main characters. Where Rome intersects with the biblical account, I believe, is of great value to any student of the New Testament. Probing the histories of men such as Caesar Augustus, Herod the Great, Herod Antipas, Tiberius, Pontius Pilate, and others, such as Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin, adds more background to the biblical record. In no case, that I observed, did "Killing Jesus" contradict the Scripture in any major way, but rather, it provided additional insight.

Of course, the core of the book centers around the horrible ordeal of Roman crucifixion and the events associated with it. Many readers report a significant emotional reaction to it. I don't believe that the authors were attempting sensationalism, but rather faithfully reporting the results of their investigations. It's not a

children's book, for sure.

As part of their historical treatment of the life of Christ, they recounted numerous biblical events. These include, but are not limited to, Jesus at 12 in the Temple, John's baptism of Jesus, the night encounter with Nicodemus (including John 3:16), Jesus' cleansing of the Temple, the Sermon on the Mount, the death of John the Baptist, the Triumphal Entry, post-resurrection events, and others.

For the most part, the authors are faithful to the Gospel accounts. Occasionally, debated views do creep in, such as the idea that Mary Magdalene had been a prostitute (p. 90) or that the crucifixion occurred on a Friday (p. 252). But overall, the book is accurate.

While O'Reilly and Dugard claim that the book is a historical account, not theological, I don't believe that this division can be made for the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Not a word about the redemptive purpose of the crucifixion is mentioned. So the reader is left with the question of why the crucifixion of Jesus is such a big historical event. Thousands of other people were crucified by Rome. Nevertheless, I believe that "Killing Jesus" can be of lasting value to the student of God's Word who wants a wider historical understanding as it relates to the Roman Empire.