

Why did Jesus Die?

Remember our principles with both authors. Borg is looking for the story behind the gospel stories of Jesus, trying to understand what might have happened before the developing tradition of Christianity (and Paul's emphasis on the resurrection) modified the narrative.

Borg is looking for a plausible hypothesis that encompasses all of the gospel stories and the available archaeological and contextual evidence.

For the death of Jesus, a few questions:

How did Jesus die? What were the processes that led to his execution (what was his crime, who tried him, how do we know?)

Did Jesus think he was going to die? Why? What are the reliable sources to tell us that?

What does Jesus's death mean for us?

- I. How Did Jesus Die?
 - a. What was Jesus's crime?
 - i. Borg: Mark's gospel seems historically plausible. Jesus rides into Jerusalem in a procession challenging Pilate and immediately starts to challenge the Temple and its oppressive tendencies. He's a teacher and prophet challenging the powers in Jerusalem, particularly disrupting the Temple.
 - ii. Wright: Jesus claimed to be the messiah, conflicting with Jewish leaders, who then presented him as a rival king to Herod, giving Pilate reason to kill him.
 - b. What happened between his crime and his punishment?
 - i. Borg: The passion story is filled with Pauline theology, and so suspect. Some History remembered, some prophecy historicized (writing the things that had been predicted into the narrative), some Imaginative Elaboration, some purposive interpretation (interpreting events with an eye toward our understanding of Jesus's purposes). So, the last supper probably reads into the actual last supper additional meaning. Jesus was probably betrayed, though it is unclear what was betrayed, and Jesus was probably arrested in Gethsemane.
 - ii. Borg: But the trials seem unlikely. First of all, how would we know what happened at trial? No one was there to hear it. Also, night-time trials are against Jewish Law. Why would Romans have bothered to take this low-class preacher before high officials? Various accounts absolving Pilate of responsibility seem fishy. Finally, his interactions with Caiphas looks like a Christian confession of faith (p 90)
 - iii. Wright: pretty much as Mark says. Very common for supposedly secret meetings to become public knowledge. Pilate is not presented sympathetically, doesn't particularly want to kill Jesus, but can't afford to ignore king claims, lest Rome find out. So he uses Jesus as a tool to undermine Jewish leaders. Furthermore, the idea that the destruction of the temple was related to Jesus's messiahship doesn't really exist in

early Christianity, so it's unclear what's supposed to have been added. Just like with Hannukah, the narrative was remembered and repeated unchanged. That's the way popular stories work in first-century Israel and other oral cultures.

- iv. Both agree that the crucifixion happened pretty much as described, much of it was common practice.

II. Did Jesus think he was going to die?

- a. Borg: As a spirit person and social prophet, he probably knew death was a likely outcome. Anything more is likely a later addition.
- b. Wright: He came to announce his kingdom and encourage others to renounce other kingdom claims. He knew that he had to fight a great battle against evil and, in concert with Jewish context, there had to be suffering for redemption. He took that suffering on himself. Martyrdom was part of a messianic task. There's no reason to think that these accounts are later additions. Suffering and death are part of the Maccabean story of Hannukah, so make sense for a would-be messiah.

III. What does Jesus's death mean for us?

- a. Borg: It's a reminder that the systems of oppression can kill anyone who stands for something, and Jesus stood against the systems of oppression as a prophet of God's kingdom.
- b. Wright: This is the fulfillment of Jesus's prophecies and culmination of Jesus's ministry as messiah and suffering servant. Jesus's death allows for the shifting from physical Temple to Temple of Jesus's body. This is Jesus's victory in the battle to establish a new kind of kingdom. It's a deeply-rooted liberation theology that frees us all from bondage to death and suffering.