

# Despising and Rejecting Jesus Today

written by Tim Jennings, M.D. | March 17, 2022



The prophet Isaiah predicted that Jesus would be “despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not” (53:3 NIV84).

Reading the Gospels, we can certainly see the fulfillment of this prophecy in Jesus’ earthly life. He was despised, rejected, and not valued or esteemed; He was eventually crucified, not merely by the pagans, but by those who claimed to be Bible-believing followers of God.

Two questions we should ask:

1. Why did the Jews—the very people claiming to be preparing for the advent of the Messiah—despise and reject Him two thousand years ago?
2. And does this prophecy apply beyond His earthly life; are people today, including Bible-believing Christians—the people today claiming to be preparing for the second advent of the Messiah—in danger of despising and rejecting Him?

When Jesus came to Earth, the people who were entrusted with being the avenue through which He would be born—and who were given the ceremonial teaching tools, the prophecies of His coming, and the historic evidences of God’s mercy, love, and gracious interventions for their good—hated and

rejected Him. Why? What was happening in their lives, situation, society, religious teachings, and belief system that caused them to despise the message that Jesus taught?

Jesus offered them a message of love, freedom, openness, truth, integrity, mercy, grace, and forgiveness for all people, including their enemies:

You have heard that it was said, “Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” But I tell you: **Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven.** He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? **Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect** (Matthew 5:43–48 NIV84, emphasis mine).

Jesus told them that if they desired to be perfect, if they wanted to be part of the family of heaven, they needed to love their enemies, to pray for those who persecuted them, to be gracious and kind to those who did them injustices.

But consider the mindset of the people to whom Jesus said this. They were living in an occupied land. The Romans were their rulers. The Jews were not autonomous. They had puppet leaders installed by Rome, including their kings (Herod) and high priests (Caiaphas). Romans were pagans; their society was built on slave labor. The Jewish people were predominantly non-citizens and didn’t have the rights of a Roman. In this environment, the Romans perpetrated all kinds of injustices upon them.

And Jesus was now telling them to love their enemies and pray for those who persecuted them. It would be like telling the French people during the Nazi occupation to love the Nazis and pray for the welfare of the German soldiers.

How do you think such a message would be received by the people in Ukraine today? What if your country had been invaded and taken over by an occupying force—and then a preacher came to town and told you to love your invaders and to pray for those who had raped your daughters and enslaved your sons?

Do you get some sense as to why the Jewish leaders despised, hated, and rejected Jesus? They didn’t want a Savior to save the people from fear, from selfishness, from hate, from abusing others. They wanted a savior who would empower them to do the very same thing to the Romans. They wanted a leader who would make their military strong, who could miraculously feed the troops, who could raise soldiers killed in battle to go back out and fight some more. If Jesus would have embraced their methods, sought to use physical might and power to destroy their earthly enemies, they would have embraced Him in a heartbeat.

But Jesus said,

**My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight** to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place (John 18:36 NIV84, emphasis mine).

Jesus' kingdom is the kingdom of love, truth, and liberty. He came to lead humanity away from a worldly focus to an eternal focus, from earthly justice to godly justice, from physical warfare to spiritual warfare, from a deliverance from human oppressors to a deliverance from sin that causes all oppression. But they didn't like this focus. They preferred the earthly to the divine, the selfish to the selfless, the power-over-others paradigm to the power-to-serve-others paradigm.

Jesus is seeking loyal friends, not submissive servants. And friendship, loyalty, love, and devotion cannot be achieved through the use of might and power; it can be achieved only by truth presented in love while leaving people free. This is why Scripture teaches God's method of warfare is "'not by might nor by power, but by [His] Spirit'" (Zechariah 4:6 NIV84). God cannot win hearts and minds by threatening and then killing those who won't love and trust Him. Thus, Jesus' kingdom does not advance through military might; it advances through people loving their enemies, praying for those who would abuse them, forgiving those who wrong them, being kind to those who invade their countries and persecute them—and then trusting God with the outcome.

Jesus told them,

You have heard that it was said, "Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth." But I tell you, **do not resist an evil person.** If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also" (Matthew 5:38-39 NIV84, emphasis mine).

Do you see why the Jews hated and rejected Jesus? It is because they were being dominated, abused, and exploited by real injustices—and they wanted "justice;" they wanted someone to come with a strong hand to punish the Romans. They did not want meek and gentle Jesus.

As you see the abuses, injustices, exploitation, and wrongs being perpetrated upon the powerless, defenseless, and vulnerable in society today, do you respond like the Jews did two thousand years ago? Are you tempted with hate, do you long for a vengeful deliverer who will come and punish these wrongdoers, to make them pay, to put them in their place?

Or do you love your enemies, pray for those who are abusing you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven?

Jesus asked what kind of people He would find when He returns: "When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8 NIV84). Will He find people faithful to Him and His kingdom of love, or will He find, like He did two thousand years ago, people who call themselves His people but who despise and reject Him because they want a different kind of savior?

Ask yourself: Which Savior are you looking for? Will you love and embrace Jesus—or despise and reject Him?