
ered a part of the hands and nails in the palms do not support the weight of the body. Spikes driven into the wrists near the median nerve would avoid broken bones (Psa. 34:20) and send radiating shocks of pain up Jesus' arms. Thus nailed, the crossbar and Jesus were lifted up onto the upright post or stipes (Num. 21:6-9; Isa. 52:13), his legs were bent at the knees, his feet placed one a top the other and then nailed directly to the front of the stipes. Searing pain shot up his unnaturally twisted legs.

Above Jesus' head was placed a board or titulus which customarily bore the name and crime of the condemned, but Pilate had written, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews" in Hebrew, Latin and Greek (Jn. 19:19-22). Below Jesus Roman soldiers stood guard to make sure those crucified died and that family or friends did remove them before death. These soldiers parted Jesus' garments and gambled for his coat (Jn. 19:23-25; Psa. 22:18). A crowd gathered to stare, gape, mock and humiliate Jesus as he hung suffering, the soldiers joined in and so did the two crucified criminals on either side of him (Lk. 23:35-37; Mt. 27:38-44; Isa. 53:12; Psa. 22:12-17). Adding to Jesus' shame were the presence of his mother, a couple of women followers and at least one disciple, John (Jn. 19:25-27).

Death would come slowly as each wound produced searing agony. The weight of his sagging body on the nails sent shooting pain up his arms. The extended position of and weight on Jesus' arms made the use of his chest and thorax muscles to breathe difficult. To take a breath, Jesus had to push his body up with his legs putting his weight on the nail in his feet causing pain to shoot up his legs. The Romans could hasten death by breaking the legs below knees, as they did to the two criminals beside Jesus (Jn. 19:31-33), placing the burden of exhalation on shoulder and arm muscles alone and resulting in exhaustion asphyxia. With every breath Jesus' raw bloody back was torn against the rough wood of the stipes, pain would shoot up his arms and legs from the spikes, fatigue would cramp and knot his muscles with relentless, throbbing pain.

After 3 to 6 hours on the cross, Jesus' lungs and heart were filling with fluid and his breathing became labored as he was slowly asphyxiating. In deep agony he cried, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Mk. 15:34; Psa. 22:1). Jesus' blood loss produced shock and dehydration causing chill shivers to rack his body and a raging thirst. A cry came from his parched lips "I thirst" and soldiers offered him a vinegar soaked sponge (Jn. 19:28-30). David prophetically described Jesus' condition, "I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; It has melted within me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue clings to

my jaws; you have brought me to the dust of death" (Psa. 22:14-15). In one last gasp, Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit." "Having said this, He breathed His last" (Lk. 23:46).

As the Sabbath was coming at sundown and the Jews did not want the bodies of the men crucified to remain on their crosses, they asked Pilate to hasten their death by breaking their legs. The soldiers broke the legs of the two thieves but not Jesus' legs as they saw he was already dead. But one soldier thrust his spear into Jesus' side and out came blood and water (Jn. 19:31-37; Psa. 34:20). Some medical authorities say this indicates a ruptured heart.

Centuries later some skeptics questioned whether Jesus really died on the cross. Some have charged Jesus only swooned and revived later falsely claiming to have resurrected from the dead. There was no doubt among his disciples nor among the hostile Roman soldiers charged with Jesus' execution that he had died (Lk. 23:47-49; Jn. 19:31-35; Mk. 15:44-45). Even Jesus' greatest enemies, the Jewish leaders acknowledged Jesus' death asking Pilate for a guard on Jesus' tomb and making it sure themselves (Mt. 27:62-66). All had witnessed Jesus' humiliation, suffering and death and none suggested he had survived the Roman scourging and crucifixion that took his life.

Why Was Jesus Crucified?

All of us face death, but Jesus' death was not a peaceful passing in his sleep, but a violent, cruel and agonizing death. Why was Jesus crucified? Jesus explained, "When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He" (Jn. 8:28) and "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to myself" (Jn. 12:32). Jesus' crucifixion revealed his identity as the Son of God and draws people to him by demonstrating the depth of God's great love. Jesus said, "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" (Jn. 15:13). Paul explained, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life" (Rom. 5:8-10).

Jesus suffered, died and was entombed. But he did not remain in the grave. (See "The Empty Tomb" by Wayne Greeson)

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"And when they had come to
the place called Calvary,
there they crucified Him,
and the criminals, one on the right
hand and the other on the left"
Luke 23:32

There They Crucified Him



Wayne Greeson

There They Crucified Him



Mere days before the crowds had thronged into the narrow streets of Jerusalem to catch a glimpse of him and shout his praises. But almost overnight the joyful cries of "Blessed is the King" had turned into screams of "Crucify him." He was arrested, abandoned by his disciples and friends, falsely accused and condemned, beaten, scourged, mocked and humiliated. The streets were lined with weeping women as he, in exhaustion from a sleepless night, weak with loss of blood, struggled to carry the very cross upon which he would be executed. "There were also two others, criminals, led with him to be put to death. And when they had come to the place called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on the right hand and the other on the left" (Lk. 23:32-33).

Perhaps it is familiarity that tends to jade us to the horrific suffering endured by Jesus at the cross to become the sacrifice for our sins. Many view the cross as a piece of glittering jewelry to dangle from one's neck or display as an ornament, decoration or work of art. The cross was a cruel, vicious and bloody instrument of torture and execution for only the worse criminals. The Romans considered crucifixion so horrible that Roman citizens were exempt from death by crucifixion if convicted of a capital offense.

What sufferings did Jesus undergo in dying upon the cross? What was a crucifixion? Why was Christ crucified? We need to understand the depth and reality of Christ's sufferings and death.

Christ's Sufferings Before The Cross

Christ came to give his life and die upon the cross. "He humbled himself and became obedient to death, even the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:8). Jesus spoke often to his disciples of his impending death by crucifixion (Mt. 16:21; 17:22-23; 20:18-19; 26:2). The burden of this foreknowledge weighed heavily upon Jesus as he entered the garden of Gethsemane with his disciples to pray late Thursday evening after their Passover meal.

"He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed. Then He said to them, 'My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death...'" (Mt. 26:37-38). Luke, the physician, describes Jesus' intense mental anguish as he prayed, "Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done'... And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling

down to the ground" (Lk. 22:42, 44). Medical doctors have diagnosed Jesus' bloody sweat as "hemohidrosis." This comes from a highly emotional state causing hemorrhaging into the sweat glands and the skin becomes fragile and tender (William D. Edwards, MD; Wesley J. Gabel, MDiv; Floyd E. Hosmer, MS, AML, "On the Physical Death of Jesus Christ," *Journal of the American Medical Association*, March 21, 1986, Vol. 255, No. 11).

An armed mob coming to arrest Jesus broke the garden peace. Jesus' sorrow was multiplied and his despair deepened as he endured Judas' betrayal and his disciples' abandonment and denial (Mt. 26:47-56, 69-75; Psa. 22:11). As Peter denied him, the depth of Jesus' aching sadness is felt as "the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter" (Lk. 22:61).

The arresting band of Jews seized and bound Jesus. As Jesus was led from place to place to be falsely accused and tried by enemies who sought to put him to death, those Jewish officers accompanying him heaped abuse upon him. They mocked and reviled Jesus, spit in his face, then blindfolded him and beat him asking him to prophesy who had hit him (Mk. 14:65; Lk. 22:63-65). Condemned to death by the Jews, Jesus was taken to Pilate. Pilate sent Jesus to Herod where his soldiers "treated him with contempt and mocked him, arrayed him in a gorgeous robe, and sent him back to Pilate" (Lk. 23:11).

Pilate brought Jesus out before the multitude seeking to release Jesus. But the crowd cried for a rebel, robber and murderer, Barabbas, to be released and for Jesus to be crucified (Mt. 27:15-26). Pilate seeking to appease the murderous mob scourged Jesus and then sought to release him. But he relented to the mob to crucify him (Lk. 23:22-25; Jn. 19:1-16). Scourging was an extreme and severe punishment and a legal preliminary to Roman execution exempting women, senators and soldiers (except deserters). The prisoner would be stripped and his hands tied above his head to a post. One or two soldiers would whip or flog the prisoner's back, buttocks and legs. The short whip usually used consisted of leather thongs on which were tied small iron balls or sharp pieces of bone. The force of the iron balls would leave deep bruises and the leather and bones would tear into the skin and muscles leaving bloody ribbons or strips of flesh and exposed muscle (1 Pet. 2:24). Blood loss could leave the victims in shock and death could occur under a severe scourging.

Though weakened, bruised and his back a bleeding pulp and possibly in pre-shock, Jesus abuse by the rough Roman soldiers was not at an end. Jesus was taken before

the entire Roman unit, who would have had little love for any Jew. They mocked Jesus clothing him in a purple robe, putting a twisted crown of thorns on his head and placing a "reed," a wooden staff in his right hand. "And they bowed the knee before him and mocked him, saying, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' Then they spat on him, and took the reed and struck him on the head" (Mt. 27:29-30; Isa. 50:6). The long sharp thorns of the crown would have pierced the tender flesh of his brow causing further bleeding wounds. The blows to his head were likely intended to drive these thorns deeper into his brow and open more wounds. Jesus was beaten so severely "his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness" (Isa. 52:14).

Christ's Crucifixion

The Persians are believed to have first used crucifixion, but the Romans developed crucifixion into a cruel tortuous slow death intent on inflicting the most pain and suffering. The term "excruciating," meaning great agony or torment, comes from the Latin for "from, or out of, the cross." Roman crucifixion was a painful, public, shameful and notorious death for slaves, insurrectionists, deserting soldiers and the vilest criminals.

Jesus began his crucifixion humiliation (Phil. 2:8) as a condemned man forced to carry the crossbar or patibulum, weighing from 75 to 125 pounds, from the courtyard where he had been beaten to the public place of execution, outside the city of Jerusalem, on a rocky hill named Golgatha, "the skull." The Romans tore the robe from Jesus' shoulders reopening the partially clotting wounds on his back. A rough hewn wooden crossbar was balanced across his neck and his bloody shoulders and his arms were likely tied outstretched to it. Exhaustion and blood-loss left Jesus too weak to bear the weight and the Romans pulled a bystander from the crowd to carry the cross (Mk. 15:21).

At Golgatha, stood the heavy upright wooden post or stipes, on which the patibulum would be secured. Jesus was offered gall, a bitter drink of wine mixed with myrrh as a mild analgesic which he tasted and then refused (Mt. 27:34; Mk. 15:23; Psa. 69:21). Jesus would not allow his senses to be dulled or his mind to be clouded. He would face and endure the full sufferings of the cross.

Jesus was stripped and thrown to the ground on his back, his arms outstretched along the patibulum and his hands were nailed. The nails were likely tapered iron spikes about 5 to 7 inches long with a squared shaft of 3/8 inch thickness, according to crucified remains found from the same time period. Remains and research indicate the nails were probably driven through the wrists, which the ancients consid-

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