

The Crucifixion – The Rest of the Story

Virtually everyone in the civilized world has heard of Jesus and is aware of the fact that He lived a long time ago and was crucified. The highlights of this story are also known to almost everyone, as a result of the holiday traditions, which refers to the event. Those who have read the New Testament, whether believer or not, know even more about the highlights of the event, while the true believers, for whom it is also an emotional, as well as spiritual issue, know and feel far more. For they have both agonized and celebrated over our Lord's most glorious sacrifice. But I wonder how many of even these really know the whole story, the whole extent of the pain and suffering which our Lord went through in order that we might be spared eternal hell. I don't know, perhaps most do know. I am too young in my faith and too inexperienced in association with other believers to know what the depth of understanding there may be regarding this matter. However, because of the momentous significance of the event and the fact that the New Testament does not tell the whole story, I feel compelled to tell what I believe I know of the rest of the story so that all may know just how much pain and suffering our Lord endured that day for the love of all who would believe in Him.

Picture if you can, this humble, non-descript man bound and dragged before pompous priests and magistrates. *"He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him"* (Isaiah 53:2). His captors were Roman soldiers, a special breed, trained for dealing with condemned prisoners, but in ways which we today cannot and do not even want to imagine. This particular prison was especially appealing to the sadistic nature, which their particular work encouraged. He was accused by "holymen" of being an enemy of their Caesar as well as a man who claimed to be God. Remember, the soldiers saw Caesar as their god, not some lowly Jew! Therefore, surely this was a just subject on which to demonstrate their best technique in the art of punishment and torture. In keeping with the theme of the accused, they fashioned a crown of thorns. These weren't little pricklers found on raspberry bushes. These were long, sharp, tough and needle-like thorns found on the akashia bush. When smashed down on His head, they tore straight through to the skull in a number of

places. Before this, He was beaten about the face by the temple guard. Then His face was covered and He was beaten again, causing severe bruising. Sometime, as part of this ordeal, His beard was ripped off His face. Thus He became unrecognizable. Then He was flogged. The usual flogging consisted of 39 blows on the back with a whip containing several thongs about 24 inches long. At the end of each thong were attached bits of metal, glass, and bone. These would rip the skin off along with muscle, exposing raw bone and causing much bleeding and often death. Given the hate that seems to have prevailed among His tormentors, the flogging most likely exceeded the usual 39 blows, because this was a Hebrew limit, not a Roman one. *“I gave my back to the smiters and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting”* (Isaiah 50:6). *“As many were astonished at thee; his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men ...”* (Isaiah 52:14).

Dramatizations and renderings generally depict Jesus struggling to carry the cross on the way to Gethsemani. Most likely, however, it was only the crossbar or patibulum, as it was called. The vertical portion was most likely already at this usual place of crucifixion. Even today there can be seen rectangular holes carved in the rock into which these timbers may have been set. The patibulum weighed about 75 to 100 lbs. and could have readily been carried by a healthy man. However, Jesus was no longer able to manage this as the Scriptures record.

Crucifixion was invented by Persians around 300 to 400 B.C. and perfected by the Romans as the most painful long-lasting torture imaginable. We get our word “excruciating” from that form of torture. It was far more than simply being nailed to a cross. It was very skillfully designed to cause the maximum amount of pain over the longest period of time. It was the wrist, which was nailed between the ulna, radius and carpal bones. Thus, no bones were broken and the wrist structure in that area was strong enough so that it would not rip apart and fail to support the body weight. The feet were spiked between the second and third metatarsal bones, again where body weight would not rip it out. The spiking was done in such a manner that the knees were bent, causing the victim to “stand with bent knees,” an impossible and painful stance for anyone to

endure for more than a few moments even with his feet on the ground. In this position, one could neither stand the pain of raising the body up against the spike in the feet nor let the body sag and rest with the weight on the wrist spikes. Yet, both were necessary intermittently in order to breathe. At best, exhaling completely was impossible. This would result in hypercarbia, while the efforts required to breathe caused severe tetanic-like muscle spasms and eventual death by asphyxia. This could all last for hours or days, depending on the strength and health of the individual. *“I am poured out like water and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels. My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death. For the dogs have encompassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet. I may tell all my bones: they look and stare upon me. They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture.”* (Psalms 22: 14, 18).

Note this incredibly graphic description of the agony of one dying on the cross (pierced hands and feet) and what the sufferers are saying on the ground. The dividing of His garments and casting lots on His vestige, which was an expensive, seamless robe too valuable to tear apart and divide among them. The last observation is the same as recorded in the New Testament by an eyewitness (John 19:24). However, Psalms 22 was written at least 970 years before the crucifixion and approximately 600 years before that form of punishment had been invented! Also, Isaiah wrote this detailed description of the event 690 years before Jesus was born!

Read carefully Isaiah 52 and 53; it defines exactly why Jesus died as eloquently and understandably, better than any other version in the New Testament!

From what has been briefly summarized above, it is most evident that this event, this torture and death, was extraordinary, vicious and violent and clearly meant to extract the maximum of pain and suffering. Our dear Lord knew this and could have ended it at any moment and in any way He wanted too. Yet, He suffered in silence and even prayed to the Father for forgiveness of His tormentors saying that they didn't know what they were

doing. What has been described is only the physical pain our Lord suffered. Having been made sin, the accumulative sin perpetuated by all mankind past, present and future, the spiritual pain of this horrid burden on the soul of Him, who had never known sin, must have been beyond all possible understanding.

Note: For a very important additional insight regarding our Lord's most horrible of all suffering in order that our sins might be cleansed away, see Paper entitled: Biblical Myths – Myth #4.