

The Crucifixion of Jesus in Excruciating Detail

1 Corinthians 1:18,24-25 is a good place for us to start in the full scope of why Jesus died for us in the way that He did, and what meaning we can take of it.

St. Paul describes our Christ Crucified to the Corinth church like this:

“For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God....For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ, He is the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than that of humankind, and the weakness of God is stronger than humankind.”

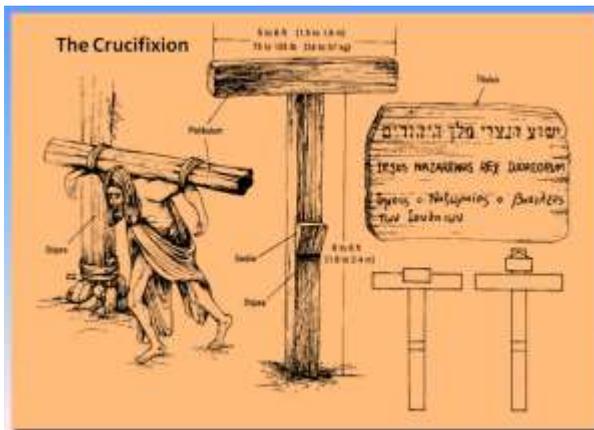


Illustration 1

To ask a Gentile to believe in a Savior who had been crucified was absolute foolishness at the time of Paul. Crucifixion was considered so obscene that no one spoke of it. If a relative had been crucified for his crimes, you would be too ashamed to mention it. A Crucified Savior was unheard of! It was foolishness to the “wisdom” of the Gentiles. It was a stumbling block to the Jews, who looked for a Kingly Messiah, not a Crucified commoner.



Illustration 2

Death by Crucifixion was designed for maximum pain with minimal blood loss, thereby extending the pain and suffering by days. **Crucifixion was, in every sense of the word, excruciating (Latin, *excruciat*, or “out of the cross”)**. In order to understand the obscenity and shame of the crucifixion, and to know the depths of the Love of our Savior, we need to understand the horrors to which our Savior willingly submitted Himself.

The Self-Offering of Jesus

We know that Jesus saw the Cross coming. He understood what manner of death was coming for Him. At the Last Supper, He knew it was to be His last one with the apostles, his dear friends. Thus, that evening, He instituted the priesthood and the Mass and the Eucharist in the Upper Room with them. He said: “This is My Body... This is My Blood, given up for you.” Then He said: “Do this in remembrance of Me.” Here Jesus was freely giving Himself to the Crucifixion that would await Him on Friday, the next day.

He took them out to the Garden to pray for the late evening. The intensity of what was coming upon Him, His Sacrifice on a Cross, was bearing down on Him. His Passion and Suffering begins officially here.

The physical trauma of Christ in Gethsemane commences with an initial aspect of His suffering - the bloody sweat. It is interesting that the physician of the group, St. Luke, is the only one to mention this in Scripture accounts. He says, “And being in agony, He prayed the longer. And his sweat became as drops of blood, trickling down upon the ground.”

Though very rare, the phenomenon of hemathidrosis, or bloody sweat, is well documented. Under great emotional stress, tiny capillaries in the sweat glands can break, thus mixing blood with sweat. This process alone could have produced marked weakness and possible shock.

After the arrest in the middle of the night, Jesus was brought before the Sanhedrin and Caiaphas, the High Priest. A soldier struck Jesus across the face for remaining silent when questioned by Caiaphas. The palace guards then blindfolded Him and mockingly taunted Him to identify them as they each passed by; they spat on Him and struck Him in the face. Jesus would then be kept up throughout this night by taunts, hits, bruises, screams in His face, and unbridled hatred and scorn. And He hasn't even faced trial yet.

Condemned to Crucifixion

In the early morning, Jesus, battered and bruised, dehydrated, and exhausted from a sleepless night, was taken across Jerusalem to the Praetorium of the Fortress Antonia. It was there, in response to the cries of the mob, that Pilate ordered Bar-Abbas released and condemned Jesus to scourging and crucifixion.

The Scourging

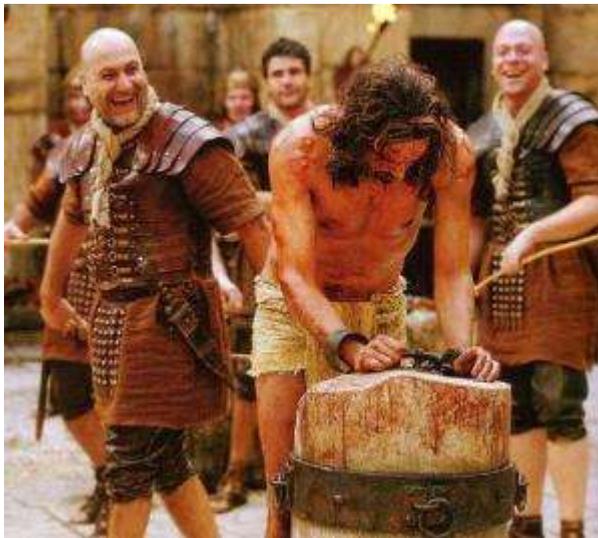


Illustration 3

Preparations for Jesus' scourging were carried out at Caesar's orders. The prisoner was stripped of His clothing and His hands tied to a post above His head. The Roman legionnaire stepped forward with the flagrum, or flagellum, in his hand. This was a short whip consisting of several heavy, leather thongs with two small

balls of lead attached near the ends of each. The heavy whip was brought down with full force again and again across Jesus' shoulders, back, and legs. At first the weighted thongs cut through the skin only. Then, as the blows continued, they cut deeper into the subcutaneous tissues, producing first an oozing of blood from the capillaries and veins of the skin and finally spurting arterial bleeding from vessels in the underlying muscles.

The small balls of lead first produced large deep bruises that were broken open by subsequent blows. Finally, the skin of the back was hanging in long ribbons, and the entire area was an unrecognizable mass of torn, bleeding tissue. When it was determined by the centurion in charge that the prisoner was near death, the beating was finally stopped.

Jesus' shoulders, back and legs feel the brute force of the whips.

The half-fainting Jesus is then untied and allowed to slump to the stone pavement, wet with His own blood. The Roman soldiers see a great joke in this provincial Jew claiming to be a king. They throw a robe across His shoulders and place a stick in His hand for a sceptre. A small bundle of flexible branches covered with long thorns is pressed into His scalp.

Again there is copious bleeding (the scalp being one of the most vascular areas in the body). After mocking Him and striking Him across the face, the soldiers take the stick from His hand and strike Him across the head, driving the thorns deeper into His scalp. Finally, they tire of their sadistic sport and the robe is torn from his back. This had already become adherent to the colts of blood and serum in the wounds, and its removal, just as in the careless removal of a surgical bandage, cause excruciating pain - almost as though He were again being whipped, and the wounds again begin to bleed.

Pre-trial

Jesus still has yet to be sentenced. This scourging was a lesson of pain for the prisoner, and meant to be a severity that might satisfy the crowds cry for blood and suffering.

The Humiliation

Jesus is led back to Pontius Pilate and He is barely recognizable from the person Who had stood before the Roman the hour or two before.



Illustration 4

The robe of king mockery they had placed on Him had already become adherent to the clots of blood and serum in His wounds, and when it is asked to be removed, Pilate sees the horrifying effect of the forty lashes. The soldiers had pushed it as far as possible from killing the man. Only Jesus' physical strength and inner determination have seemed to keep Him alive to this point. As the robe is given its removal, like in the careless removal of a surgical bandage, it causes excruciating pain on our Savior. The wounds again began to bleed.

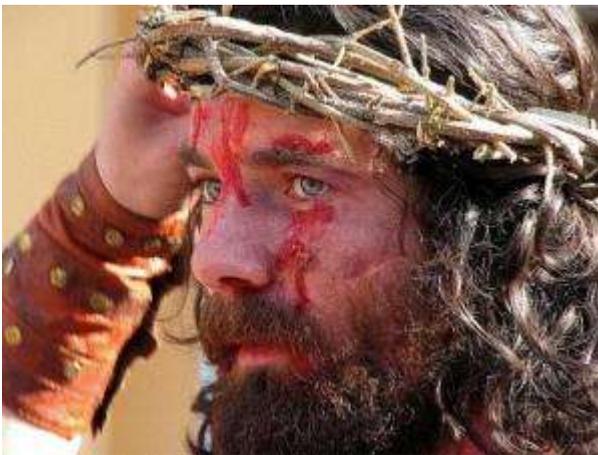


Illustration 5

Jesus had not drank since the night before, so the combination of the beatings, the crown of thorns, and the scourging would have set into motion an irreversible process of severe dehydration and cardio respiratory failure. All of this was done so that the prophecies would be fulfilled:

- I can count all my bones: they look and stare upon me. Psalm 22:17

- I gave my back to those who strike, and my cheeks to those who pull out the beard; I hid not my face from disgrace and spitting. Isaiah 50:6
- As many were astonished at you— his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind. Isaiah 52:14
- Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. Isaiah 53:4-5
- He is a Lamb led to the slaughter. John the Baptist’s words become hauntingly fulfilled; “Behold the Lamb of God, Who comes to take away the sins of the world.”
- He is taking the sins of the world onto His innocent self, as a lamb sacrifice, but transformed to a God/man sacrifice for the world.
- Not so far away is the place where Abraham brought his son Isaac for the sacrifice, when and where God intervened, saying: ‘I will provide the sacrifice, Abraham.’

Behold the Man

As Pilate looks upon the bloodied and torn man before him, of whom the Jews were calling their “king,” he exclaims: Behold the Man!

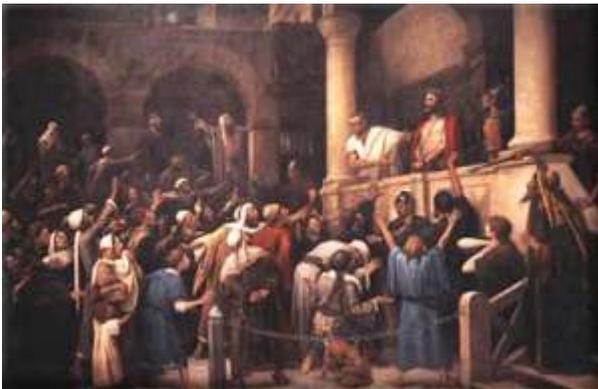


Illustration 6

There is significance of the scarlet robe and crown of thorns on Jesus: is to emphasize Jesus’ taking the sins of the world upon His body. The Bible describes sin by the color of scarlet and that thorns first appeared after the fall, as a sign of

the curse. Thus, the articles that He wore are symbols to show that Jesus took on the sins (and the curse) of the world upon Himself.

Genesis 3:17-18 is recalled: “Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field.

“Isaiah 1:18 is becoming fulfilled in the Messiah figure the prophet had heralded would come one day: “Come now, let us reason together,” says the LORD. ”Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.”

He Is Taken To Be Crucified

The people have shouted “crucify him, crucify him.” Pilate delivers the sentence. He shall be crucified. The Roman soldiers under him are to carry it out.

The walk to crucifixion

- The heavy beam of the cross is then tied across Jesus’ shoulders, and the procession of the condemned Christ, with two thieves, and the execution detail, now begins its slow journey. The weight of the heavy wooden beam, together with the shock produced by copious blood loss, is too much. He stumbles and falls a few times. The rough wood of the beam gouges into the lacerated skin and muscles of the shoulders. He tries to rise, but human muscles have been pushed beyond their endurance.
- Crazy, the soldiers beat and lash at Him for not moving along. This will only slow Him down more. Eventually, it dawns on the soldiers minds that help is needed. A man is chosen from the crowd, someone pretty big and strong. He is an innocent bystander. He looks Cyrenean. His name is Simon.
- The path through the city goes slowly, but soon they go through a gate through the wall, and now they are outside the side, heading to a dump of a place with former victims of crucified left to rot, and it is why it is called Golgotha, the place of the skull.
- With Simon’s help, Jesus clings to the Cross and helps move it to Calvary’s hill. He seems to be embracing the Cross, rather than despising it. It is a physical demonstration of hugging the wood.



Illustration 7

It was customary for the condemned man to carry his own cross from the flogging post to the site of crucifixion outside the city walls. He was usually naked, unless this was prohibited by local customs. Most artistic renditions have Jesus wearing a loincloth, put there by respect of the artist for Jesus the victim, and for respect to the viewer of the art not to concentrate on the exposed groin, but of the whole Jesus, in such agony and pain in this awful event of history. It is likely that the patibulum of the cross (weighing 75 to 125 lb.) was what was placed across the nape of the victim's neck and balanced along both shoulders. Usually, the outstretched arms were tied to the crossbar.

It was a 650-yard journey from the Fortress Antonia to the place of Golgotha.

Crucifixion

Crucifixion was invented by the Persians approximately 300-400 B.C. It was "perfected" by the Romans in the first century B.C. It is arguably the most painful death ever invented by man and is where we get our term "excruciating." It was reserved primarily for the most vicious of criminals, as well as conquered foes.

Victims of crucifixion were typically stripped naked and their clothing divided by the Roman guards. In Jesus' case this was done in fulfillment of Psalm 22:18, "They divided My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots."

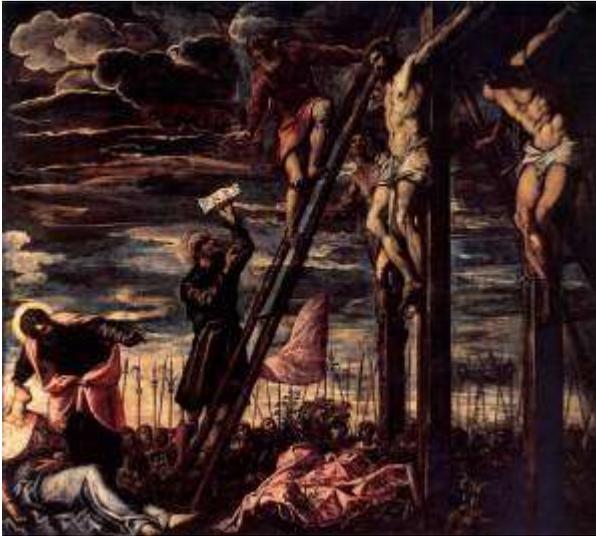


Illustration 8

Outside the city walls were permanently located the heavy upright wooden stipes, on which the patibulum would be secured. At the site of execution, by law, the victim was given a bitter drink of wine mixed with myrrh (gall) as a mild analgesic. Even though Jesus was severely dehydrated through blood and fluid loss, He refused this drink. He chose to face death in full control of His senses.

It was a merciful Jewish practice to give to those led to execution a draught of strong wine mixed with myrrh so as to deaden consciousness. But having tasted it....Jesus would not drink it.He would meet Death, even in his sternest and fiercest mood, and conquer by submitting to the full.....

In that 11th Station, the so-named criminal Jesus was then thrown to the ground on his back, with his arms outstretched along the patibulum. The hands could be nailed or tied to the crossbar, but nailing apparently was preferred by the Romans. The archaeological remains of a crucified body, found in an ossuary near Jerusalem and dating from the time of Christ, indicate that the nails were tapered iron spikes approximately 5 to 7 in (13 to 18 cm) long with a square shaft 3/8 in (1 cm) across. Furthermore, ossuary findings and the Shroud of Turin have documented that the nails commonly were driven through the wrists rather than the palms.



Illustration 9

After both arms were fixed to the crossbar, the patibulum and the victim, together, were lifted onto the stipes. On the low cross, four soldiers could accomplish this relatively easily. However, on the tall cross, the soldiers used either wooden forks or ladders. Next, the feet were fixed to the cross, either by nails or ropes. Ossuary findings and the Shroud of Turin suggest that nailing was the preferred Roman practice. Although the feet could be fixed to the sides of the stipes or to a wooden footrest, they usually were nailed directly to the front of the stipes. To accomplish this, flexion of the knees may have been quite prominent, and the bent legs may have been rotated laterally. The left foot was pressed backward against the right foot. With both feet extended, toes down, a nail was driven through the arch of each, leaving the knees moderately flexed. The victim was now crucified.



Illustration 10

When the nailing was completed, the titulus was attached to the cross, by nails or cords, just above the victim's head. The soldiers and the civilian crowd often taunted and jeered the condemned man, and the soldiers customarily divided up his clothes among themselves.

To add to the horror, insects would light upon or burrow into the open wounds or the eyes, ears, and nose of the dying and helpless victim, and even birds of prey would tear at these sites. Moreover, it was customary to leave the corpse on the cross to be devoured by predatory animals. However, by Roman law, the family of the condemned could take the body for burial, after obtaining permission from the Roman judge

Since no one was intended to survive crucifixions, the body was not released to the family until the soldiers were sure that the victim was dead. By custom, one of the Roman guards would pierce the body with a sword or lance. Traditionally, this was a spear wound to the heart through the right side of the chest — a fatal wound probably taught to most Roman soldiers. The Shroud of Turin documents this form of injury. Moreover, the standard infantry spear, which was 5 to 6 ft long, could easily have reached the chest of a man crucified on the low cross.”

As Jesus slowly sagged down with more weight on the nails in the wrists, excruciating, fiery pain shot along the fingers and up the arms to explode in the brain. The nails in the wrists were putting pressure on the median nerve, large nerve trunks which traverse the mid-wrist and hand. As He pushed himself upward to avoid this stretching torment, He placed His full weight on the nail through His feet. Again there was searing agony as the nail tore through the nerves between the metatarsal bones of His feet.

The scourging prior to crucifixion served to weaken the condemned man and, if blood loss was considerable, to produce orthostatic hypotension and even hypovolemic shock. When the victim was thrown to the ground on his back, in preparation for transfixion of the hands, as was Jesus, his scourging wounds most likely would become torn open again and contaminated with dirt. Furthermore, with each respiration, the painful scourging wounds would be scraped against the rough wood of the stipes. As a result, blood loss from the back probably would continue throughout the crucifixion ordeal. More pain.

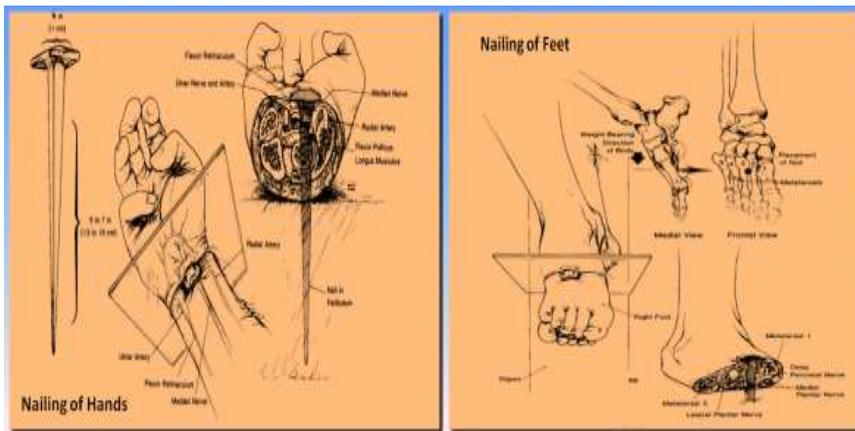


Illustration 11

At this point, another phenomenon occurred. As the arms fatigued, great waves of cramps swept over the muscles, knotting them in deep relentless, throbbing pain. With these cramps came the inability to push Himself upward. Hanging by the arm, the pectoral muscles, the large muscles of the chest, were paralyzed and the intercostal muscles, the small muscles between the ribs, were unable to act. Air could be drawn into the lungs, but could not be exhaled. Jesus fought to raise Himself in order to get even one short breath. Finally, the carbon dioxide level increased in the lungs and in the blood stream, and the cramps partially subsided.

Forces of Darkness

While He was on the cross, darkness covered the land (noon to three p.m.). Jesus, in Luke 22:53, associates those who arrested Him with the power of darkness. Where were the evil forces while Jesus was on the cross? The verses below from Psalm 22 seem out of place when first read. There seems to be no mention of “*bulls*” and “*lions*” around the cross. The verses, however, have a deeper meaning. Bashan was an area to the east of the Jordan River which was famous for its fertility. There cattle were raised which grew to enormous sizes. The people

there worshipped demon spirits (associated with Baal) within the cattle. 1 Pet 5:8 describes Satan as “a roaring lion...seeking those who he may devour” These verses are thus suggestive of the spiritual activity of Satan and his demons, celebrating as Jesus was suffering on the cross.

Psalm 22:12-13: “Many bulls surround me; **strong bulls of Bashan encircle me. Roaring lions tearing their prey open their mouths wide against me.**”

Jesus looks down at many of the Jews who had turned on him and cried for crucifixion. Most of them were religious leaders that had not the faith nor desire to recognize Him for Who He was: Their Messiah.

Jesus feels his feet in torment. With knees flexed and fixed at a 45 degree angle, the two feet were crucified as one by a nail nine inches long. The dorsal pedal artery of the foot is pierced, though this is not where the most bleeding is coming from. Yet with each push up for air and movement, the pain rockets the body.

With arms outstretched but not taut, the wrists were nailed with iron spikes to the patibulum. It has been shown that the ligaments and bones of the wrist can support the weight of a body hanging from them. The nerves crushed in the wrists/hands would have produced. produce excruciating bolts of fiery pain in both arms.

The major effect of crucifixion, beyond the excruciating pain, was a marked interference with normal respiration, particularly exhalation. The weight of the body, pulling down on the outstretched arms and shoulders, would tend to fix the intercostal muscles in an inhalation state and thereby hinder passive exhalation.

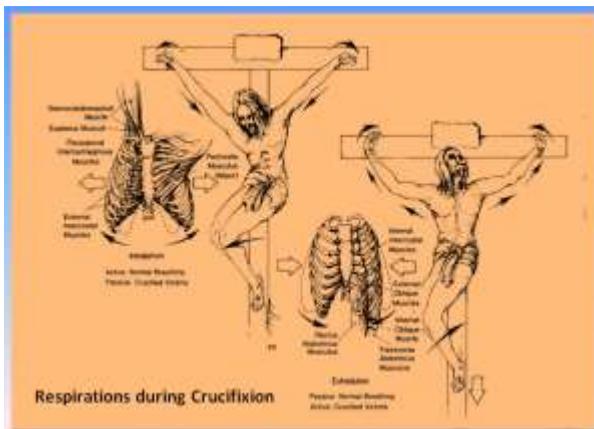


Illustration 12

Accordingly, exhalation was primarily diaphragmatic, and breathing was shallow. Spasms then came, hindering respiration even more. The resulting position on the cross sets up a horrific sequence of events which results in a slow, painful death. Having been pinned to the cross, the victim now has an impossible position to maintain. He will eventually give in. Jesus will note the moment of surrender coming. He says: “It is consummated, (meaning, it is finished)” and then He says: “Father, into Your Hands I commend My Spirit.” And, He dies.

He had suffered hours of limitless pain, cycles of twisting, joint-rending cramps, intermittent partial asphyxiation, and searing pain from heart to head and foot to back.

He did all of this suffering for love of you and me and our salvation. Will it matter for our own sake? Will we revere The Cross of Jesus and His Salvation offer?

The prophecy in Psalm 22:14 was fulfilled: “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.” Jesus had prayed the 22nd Psalm on The Cross, and He is The One Who IS the 23rd Psalm’s Fulfiller. He is The Shepherd Whose Staff and Crook guide us and “to goodness and mercy all the days of our life and forevermore. “ Amen.

