
The Sufferings Of Jesus

*“Then they brought Him to the place Golgotha, which is translated, Place of a Skull. They tried to give Him wine mixed with myrrh; but He did not take it. And they crucified Him, . . .” (Mark 15:22–24a).
“And He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed” (1 Peter 2:24).*

The Scriptures do not present the gory side of our Lord’s crucifixion. Matthew, Mark, and Luke simply declared that the event occurred; they did not describe it. Mark wrote, “They crucified Him” (Mark 15:24a), while Luke added only the word “there” to the simple phrase (Luke 23:33b). Matthew and John referred to it with quiet backward glances. John said, “When they had crucified Jesus” (John 19:23; see Matthew 27:35). The reticence of the Scriptures concerning Jesus’ death is remarkable. It is almost as if a holy reverence is wrapped around that awful moment when Jesus was actually crucified. The Gospel writers passed over the details and moved quickly into depicting what happened while our Lord was hanging on the cross.

The Romans had probably borrowed this horrible means of capital punishment from the Carthaginians. The brutality of crucifixion made even the Romans shudder at the thought of it. They reserved its use for slaves and those who were not covered under the privileges of Roman citizenship. The torture was so appalling that it brought a new word to the vocabulary of the time. They called it *cruciatu*s, a Latin word that they seem to have derived from *crux*, the word for “cross.” From this word comes the English word “excruciating.”

Because so little is said about the actual crucifixion of Jesus in the New Testament, and because in that ancient world crucifixion was administered in different ways, it is difficult to know the details of how He was crucified. Extrabiblical evidence gives four major forms of

crucifixion. The first one, the least conventional one, was the “stake” type of cross upon which the body of the prisoner was impaled or nailed. We can be certain that Jesus was not crucified in this fashion. The three others were the “X” type of cross (known as Andrew’s cross), the “T” type of cross (known as Anthony’s cross), and the “plus sign” (“+”) type of cross (known as the Christian cross). Of these three possibilities, the New Testament text indirectly points to the “plus sign” cross as the one used to crucify Jesus. All of the Gospel writers mentioned a sign that Pilate had written, stating the reason for Jesus’ execution. It was placed, Matthew and Luke said, over His head on the cross. The “X” and the “T” types of crosses had no central beams extending above the head, so there would have been no way to attach this sign above Jesus’ head on either of these crosses (Matthew 27:37).

Sometimes the arms and legs of the victim were tied to the cross, and sometimes they were nailed to it. In other cases the hands or wrists were nailed and the feet were tied, or the hands and arms were tied and the feet were nailed. In Jesus’ case, it is clear that both His hands (John 20:20) and feet (Luke 24:39) were nailed to the cross; for, following His resurrection, His hands and feet were offered as proof of His crucifixion and resurrection. His hands were probably nailed at the upper part of the palm or in the wrists so that the weight of His body would not pull His hands loose from the cross. His feet may have been placed on top of each other and nailed to the cross by one spike.

Evidence of one crucifixion practice was discovered in 1968, when an ossuary (a box containing a person's bones) was found in a Jewish cemetery near Jerusalem. It contained the remains of a crucified victim whose name, Jehohanan ben Hagqol, was scratched on the side of the ossuary. The remains indicate that one nail (still in place) had been driven through the heels of his feet.

Usually, the fatal part of crucifixion was asphyxiation. It was extremely difficult for the victim to breathe. He could inhale, but he could not easily exhale. In order to prolong the suffering, a little projection, a kind of seat, was sometimes attached to the middle of the cross so that the victim could sit astride it. Sitting upon this small saddle would take the major weight off the victim's arms, and he would be able to breathe more easily. This caused the crucified one to linger on the cross, eventually dying of blood loss and thirst. It is unknown whether or not the cross of Jesus had such a projection in the middle of it.

Even though the New Testament does not tell us much about Jesus' actual crucifixion, it does give considerable information concerning the reasons for His crucifixion. It says that He had to endure *the wrath of man* against the truth. The ones who crucified Jesus were actually religious people who had rejected God's truth. They had their temple, their positions of influence, their way of life, and their power. They were settled into what they wanted in this life, and they did not want to be disturbed or removed from it. The thought of making changes to live according to the way of truth turned them into a mob without a conscience, pleading with wicked voices for God's Son to be crucified. They became senseless and hard-hearted, lawless and wild. The scourging was not enough for them. They incessantly cried out for Jesus to be crucified, until Pilate, against his better judgment, granted their demand. They stood at the cross and godlessly hurled taunts at Jesus while He died. However, Jesus willingly suffered through man's wrath that was poured out upon Him.

The Scriptures also inform us that Jesus, as He died on the cross, bore the wrath of hell against righteousness. Clustering around the cross was the battle of the ages: Truth and

evil were engaged in a cosmic conflict that the world did not understand and perhaps does not understand to this day. Prophecies concerning these events began with Genesis 3:15: "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel." During Jesus' earthly life, the devil and the demons of hell did everything they could do to prevent His death for the sin of the world. Their activity is especially seen in His temptations in the wilderness, in His struggle in Gethsemane, in the trials that led to crucifixion, and in the humiliation of the cross. The enemies of righteousness put before Him the worst type of execution that they could concoct, filling it with His blood, pain, and mockery. They drenched it with everything vile and torturous. However, Jesus faithfully suffered through the wrath of hell.

The New Testament also reveals that Jesus experienced in His dying the wrath of heaven against sin. Behind the physical part of it, behind the visual agony of it, Jesus bore a spiritual burden that no one can imagine. What He carried upon Himself as He suffered towers above man as the heavens tower above the earth. Peter said that He "bore our sins in His body on the cross" (1 Peter 2:24). Isaiah wrote of His death in a vivid prophecy: "He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities" (Isaiah 53:5). Perhaps the most graphic picture of what happened is given not in Isaiah or the Gospels, but in 2 Corinthians 5:21: "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." Jesus, in a way far beyond our ability to understand, became sin for us. John chose a big word to depict it: "propitiation." This word means "to appease the wrath of God against sin." John wrote, "And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world" (1 John 2:2). Even though we cannot envision all that the New Testament tells us about His death, we can see through its lens that Jesus bore the wrath of heaven against sin when He died.

It is not necessary for us to understand a divine event fully before we can believe it fully. We do not understand how God created

the earth, but we believe that He did. None of us can explain how Jesus worked His miracles, but we have faith that He did. No one can give a scientific explanation of how He rose from the dead, but we must accept the testimony of the New Testament that He did. Who can tell us how He ascended back to the Father? We cannot explain what happened, but we accept what God's Word says about it. We believe all of these truths because they have been revealed to us in the Scriptures. This fact is also true of the cross. Do we understand how He bore our guilt on that tree? No. Do we believe that He did bear our sins at the cross? Yes, indeed. We

hug this truth to our hearts in faith because it is the clear affirmation of the Scriptures.

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"For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3); "Who gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father" (Galatians 1:4); "You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin" (1 John 3:5).