**Roman Crucifixion Methods: What Did Jesus Endure?
By Jack Wellman**

Crucifixion is believed to be the worst kind of death that has ever been invented. What was it like? What did Jesus have to endure so that you and I could have eternal life?

**The Worst of All Executions**

Perhaps the most cruel, vindictive, torturous death anyone at anytime in history could have ever experienced was to be crucified. There is nothing that is even remotely close to such a barbaric death penalty as crucifixion was. The Romans had stolen the idea from the ancient Persians and Alexander the Great introduced the idea to the Greek Empire but these forms of death were given only to pirates and the worst of criminals. In the Roman Empire, the crucified person would be left hanging on the cross for several hours of torture. They were crucified completely naked and well above the ground and usually on main thoroughfares and on high ground so that everyone could see the penalty for committing crimes or insurrection. It was meant to be a deterrent. At Jesus’ crucifixion, which took place on Golgotha (place of the skull), there must have been thousands who witnessed it. The chances for survival were next to impossible.

(Aside in this site. Consider the following: [The “Old Man” did Not Die with Christ, but was Crucified with Christ!](https://www.koffeekupkandor.com/gods-word-six.php#The%20%E2%80%9COld%20Man%E2%80%9D%20did%20Not%20Die%20with%20Christ,%20but%20was%20Crucified%20with%20Christ!))

**Bearing the Cross**

The condemned criminals had to carry their cross to the place of execution. Contrary to what is depicted by artists, Jesus likely only carried the cross-arm (called the patibulum) because the upright post (called the stipes) was generally set in the ground already and was used over and over again since there was a shortage of trees in the area and the Roman‘s did not like spending a lot of time with crucifixions. Jesus carried this heavy beam, which would have been rough and splinter-laden to cause even more pain. It must have been about 7-8 feet long and around one foot wide and at least a half of a foot thick. It could have weighed around 100 pounds or more. The fact that Jesus struggled to carry it and needed help was not due to the weight but because of Jesus’ scourging by the Romans who had beaten Him to a bloody pulp. He would have lost so much blood by the time that He was carrying it that He was unable to make it the entire distance.

It should be noted that Jesus' trade required great physical strength. [Jesus](http://www.whatchristianswanttoknow.com/historical-evidence-of-jesus-christs-resurrection/) must have been a very strong man because carpenters in those days had to cut down their own timbers, carry them some distance and cut them to size. Considering that stone masonry was part of carpentry at that time, this also meant that He must have had to quarry and cut stones, transport them, and them lift them into place. Being a carpenter in Jerusalem was the most physically demanding trade in the Roman Empire so Jesus was obviously not the effeminate figure that He appears in so many artistic works.

**Nail Placement**

The nails were much like railroad spikes but much longer.

When we read about the nails that pierced Jesus’ hands and feet, these were not nails as we think of them. They were much like railroad spikes but much longer. They resembled what are called garden spikes and they were about ¾ inch wide and around 6 to 8 inches long. When they were driven through the hands and feet, they were hammered flat on the back side of the wooden beam so that they would keep their impaled victims in place. These nails were not driven into the hands but actually into the wrists because the wrists were considered to be part of the hand and the palms of the hands were insufficient to hold up the weight of a person. There were enough tendons to support the body weight of a man if these were driven through the wrist between the radius and ulna which is where these had to be hammered in order to hold him up on the cross.

As for the feet, they drove one large nail (like a railroad spike) through the top side of the middle of the feet. These were hammered through both feet and they bent the knees of the victim. The victim would have had to push themselves up to breathe, which produced excruciating pain. The feet may have rested on a foot-rest (suppedaneum) but it is unknown if Jesus had one of these.

**The Scourging**

Scourging was just part of Jesus’ punishment and was more than a severe beating. It involved whips or lashes made of leather thongs which were attached to a handle. These thongs contained metal fragments and pieces of bones that literally tore the flesh off of Jesus. After Jesus was scourged it was recorded to say,

“When Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, Pilate said to them, “Here is the man” ([John 19:5](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=John+19.5&t=NKJV))!

What Pilate was really saying was,

“Look at this man! Isn’t this enough? He’s hardly recognizable as a human being. Look at Him!”

Even with this bloody pulp of a Man, they still screamed, “Crucify Him” ([John 19:6](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=John+19.6&t=NKJV))!

They also attached a crown of thorns that were likely 1 to 2 inch thorns of briar that were hard as oak and they likely penetrated not only through the skin but penetrated parts of the skull bone. This would have caused a large loss of blood and created severe hemorrhaging of the brain tissues. By the time Jesus went to the cross, He had pieces of His flesh hanging off of Him and He had large open wounds that bled profusely. He also must have been unrecognizable because Isaiah records in 52:14 that

“Just as many were astonished at you, my people, so His appearance was marred more than any man And His form more than the sons of men.” ([Isaiah 52:14](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Isaiah+52.14&t=NKJV))

What this is saying was that He didn’t even look human anymore and was so marred that no Man has ever been reduced to the pulverized piece of flesh that Jesus was.

**The Humiliation**

Jesus was spit upon, His beard was plucked out, His teeth were likely beaten in or broken off, and they ridiculed Him, laughed Him to scorn, mocked Him and feigned Him as “the King of the Jews” all the while putting Him to open shame. All the while, Jesus was silent, never raised His voice, never tried to resist. He took the full brunt of all the wickedness of all of humanity for all time. The religious leaders also taunted Him and said if

“You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God! In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him! He saved others,” they said, “but he can’t save himself! He’s the King of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him.” ([Matthew 27:40-42](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Matthew+27.40-42&t=NKJV))!

**Refused Vinegar and Hyssop**

In Jesus’ humanity, He must have thirsted like no other human being has ever thirsted. Remember that He had nearly no blood after the overnight trial and was literally dying of thirst. Then,

“they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it” ([Mark 15:23](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Mark+15.23&t=NKJV)).

The wine vinegar was usually given to dull the senses of the condemned criminals as some sort of pain killer to lessen the effects of the torture. Some manuscripts say it was attached to a hyssop which is an herb that grows wild in the Mediterranean region and for centuries has been considered an herbal medicine. Myrrh, which means “bitter” comes from a tree and also has medicinal properties which could dull the senses due to severe pain. The astonishing thing is that “he did not take it” ([Mark 15:23](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Mark+15.23&t=NKJV)). This means that Jesus refused the offer of a pain killing mix of myrrh and wine that would have made His torture somewhat more bearable. His side was pierced with a sword to see if He was dead and water and blood poured out from His side. His internal organs were probably pulverized or like turned to wax.

I believe the reason that He refused this was to take on the full brunt of all of the wrath of God for all of humanity for all time, for all of the sins that humans have committed, were committing, and will ever commit in the future (as in today, some 2,000 years later). [Jesus paid a penalty](http://www.whatchristianswanttoknow.com/quotes-about-the-resurrection-23-good-sayings/) sufficient for all of the sins for all of the humans that had been born, going back into the Old Testament, that had occurred during the New Testament period, and for today, tomorrow, and ages without end. So complete was this supreme of all sacrifices that it covered Abraham’s sins, Moses, Joshua’s, David’s, and for all those living then, for all those living today and in the last 2,000 years, and for all time without end into the eternal Kingdom of Heaven, which will be a government of God without ending because of “the increase of his government and peace there will be no end“ ([Isaiah 9:7a](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Isaiah+9.7a&t=NKJV)). How many of your sins and how many of my sins were ahead of Jesus’ sacrifice when He died and paid the price for them all? All of them! As it is written,

“But when this priest [Jesus] had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God” ([Hebrews 10:12](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Hebrews+10.12&t=NKJV)).

**The Grave Couldn’t Hold Him**

Jesus died the most horrendous death ever contrived by human beings in all of history but the grave couldn’t hold Jesus. Why? It is because Jesus had never sinned and so no grave could hold a sinless God-Man. Since the wages of sin is death ([Romans 6:23](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Romans+6.23&t=NKJV)) death could not keep Jesus in His grave because He was sinless. It is a historical fact that

“God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him” ([Acts 2:24](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Acts+2.24&t=NKJV)).

This long agonizing day was after an all night vigil without sleep, an illegal trial by night, false witnesses testifying against Jesus, Pilate declaring His innocence, his scourging, and hanging on the cross from 9 A.M. until His death at 3 P.M. I do not believe it is coincidental that at the same time of Jesus’ death, the Passover sacrifice was made. He hung on that cross for some 6 hours in utter agony after being tortured all night. This shows just how much God loved us. To send His own Son to die such a horrific death is just too much to try and describe. Since He died for you, why not place your trust in Him today and then you will never die but have eternal life in [Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior](http://www.whatchristianswanttoknow.com/come-to-jesus/). If not, you will face Him as your Judge on that Day ([Revelation 20](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Revelation+20&t=NKJV)).

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[What Christians Want to Know - Roman Crucifixion Methods by Jack Wellman](http://www.whatchristianswanttoknow.com/roman-crucifixion-methods-what-did-jesus-endure/)