

# Carrying Two Crosses

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake from multiple Internet sources)

## Introduction:

Crucifixion was used among the Seleucids and Romans from the 6th century BC to the 4th century AD. In the year 337, Emperor Constantine abolished it in the Roman Empire out of respect for Jesus Christ. Crucifixion was performed to terrorize and discourage witnesses from crime or rebellion. Victims were left on display after death as warnings to others. Crucifixion was intended to provide a death that was slow, painful, graphic, humiliating, and public. Crucifixion methods varied considerably with location and time period.

In some cases, the condemned was forced to carry the crossbeam on his shoulders to the place of execution. A whole cross would weigh over 300 pounds, but the crossbeam would not be as heavy, weighing around 75–125 pounds. The Roman historian Tacitus records that the city of Rome had a specific area reserved for the execution of slaves by crucifixion. Upright posts were fixed permanently in place, and the crossbeam, with the condemned person already nailed to it, would then be attached to the post.

Josephus states that at the Siege of Jerusalem (70 AD), "the soldiers out of rage and hatred, nailed those they caught, one after another, to the crosses by way of jest."

While a crucifixion was an execution, it was also a humiliation, by making the condemned as vulnerable as possible. Although artists have depicted the figure on a cross with a loin cloth, writings by Seneca the Younger suggest that most victims were crucified completely naked. Cicero described crucifixion as "a most cruel and disgusting punishment," and suggested that "the very mention of the cross should be far removed not only from a Roman citizen's body, but from his mind, his eyes, and his ears."

Frequently, the legs of the person executed were shattered with an iron club, an act called *crurifragium*, which hastened the death of the person but was also meant to deter those who observed the crucifixion from attempting rescue.

The cross took varied shapes depending on time, resources, and location. Josephus describes multiple tortures and positions of crucifixion during the Siege of Jerusalem. Seneca the Younger recounts: "I see crosses there, not just of one kind but made in many different ways: some have their victims with head down to the ground; some impaled; others stretch out their arms on the gibbet."

One vertical stake - Latin *crux simplex*; more frequently there was a cross-piece attached either at the top to give the shape of a T (*crux commissa* or tau cross) or just below the top, as in the form most familiar in Christian symbolism (*crux immissa*). But the *crux immissa* is believed to be an invention of Emperor Constantine some 300 years later. Other forms were in the shape of the letters X and Y. The New Testament does not speak specifically about the shape of that cross, but the earliest patristic writings that do speak of its shape, from about the year 100 on, describe it as shaped like the letter T (the Greek letter tau).

A foot-rest (*suppedaneum*) attached to the cross, perhaps for the purpose of taking the person's weight off the arms. Ancient sources also mention the *sedile*, a small seat attached to the front of the cross, about halfway down which could have served a similar purpose. On occasion, the victim's feet were attached to the stipes by ropes or nails. In 1968, archaeologists discovered at Giv'at ha-Mivtar in northeast Jerusalem the

remains of one Jehohanan, who had been crucified in the 1st century. The remains included a heel bone with a nail driven through it from the side. This suggests instead that the heels were nailed on each side of the upright.

The length of time required to reach death could range from hours to days depending on method, the victim's health, and the environment. Death could result from any combination of causes, including blood loss, sepsis, or by the scourging that sometimes preceded the crucifixion, or eventual dehydration. The typical cause of death was asphyxiation. The condemned would have severe difficulty inhaling, due to hyper-expansion of the chest muscles and lungs. The condemned would therefore have to draw himself up by his arms, leading to exhaustion, or use his feet against the nails, rope or peg. When no longer able to lift himself, the condemned would suffocate within a few minutes.

There is a record of one person who survived a crucifixion that was intended to be lethal, but was interrupted. Josephus recounts: "I saw many captives crucified, and remembered three of them as my former acquaintances. I was very sorry at this in my mind, and went with tears in my eyes to Titus, and told him of them; so he immediately commanded them to be taken down, and to have the greatest care taken of them, in order to their recovery; yet two of them died under the physician's hands, while the third recovered." (Wikipedia)

- A. The purpose of this is not to address the suffering of the Savior, although this may serve to illustrate it. It is designed for two purposes:
  - 1. To demonstrate that there is nothing honorable or glorious about crucifixion or crosses
  - 2. To help us to understand there will be nothing pleasant about bearing our own - Matt. 16:24-26
- B. Would you be surprised to learn that the cross of Christ is not enough to get you to heaven, that you need a second cross?

## **I. THE CROSS OF CHRIST**

- A. The cross of Jesus, by itself, is not enough to get anyone to heaven.
  - 1. If it were, everyone would be saved - Titus 2:11
  - 2. However, many will be lost - Matt. 7:13-14
- B. The cross of Christ is fully sufficient for its purpose: to create a means for humankind to be saved and go to heaven
  - 1. Sufficient to satisfy our debt of sin
  - 2. 2Cor. 5:21; 1Cor. 1:18; Eph. 2:16; Titus 2:14
- C. Without the cross of Christ, there would be no salvation.

## **II. OUR OWN CROSS**

- A. Bearing our own cross, by itself, is not enough to get us to heaven.
- B. Salvation comes to us through the Divine agency of the cross of Christ and through the human activity of bearing our own cross.
- C. Matt. 7:21-23; Eph. 2:8-10; Phil. 2:12-13; Titus 2:11-13; James 2:20-26

Conclusion: The cross of Christ is a settled matter; Jesus did his part. The only matter in question is whether we will whole-heartedly take up our cross and follow Jesus.