

ROME
& THE BIRTH OF
CHRISTIANITY

Part 6: Introduction

On that Friday that men call Good, Jesus of Nazareth, the incarnate Son of God was condemned to die by crucifixion and was suspended between heaven and earth for six hours on a Roman cross, suffering unimaginable agony and humiliation. Isaiah, speaking of the Suffering Servant, tells us that “he was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth” (Is. 53:7). Faced with chilling stories of human torture, every sensibility within us demands that we avert our eyes and our ears from the incomprehensible horror and wickedness. But we must look. For here hangs the Savior of the world whose death gained our pardon.



Acknowledgements & Sensitivities

- Before we begin, I acknowledge that the details of scourging and crucifixion are extremely difficult to hear.
- I have been reading extensively about Roman crucifixion - especially about the crucifixion of our Lord - and admit that this has been a week of deep sorrow for me. “He who increases knowledge increases sorrow” (Eccl. 1:18b).
- I have deliberately held back some of the gory details of our Lord’s suffering, while seeking to share enough in order for you to see His immeasurable, unconditional, and infinite love for you. “How can it be that Thou, my God, shouldst die for me? Amazing love!”

Our Way Forward

- Documenting the fact of Roman mass executions by crucifixion in various places throughout the Empire
- Pilate washing his hands before the people
- Roman scourging with a *flagellum*
- Hypovolemic shock
- What happens in the Praetorium
- The crucifixion
- C.S. Lewis
- The Oberammergau Passion Play in Germany

Josephus: Incidents of Crucifixion

- Alexander Jannaeus, the second Hasmonean king of Judea (103-76 BC), brought rebel prisoners up to Jerusalem. Josephus writes that “so furious was he that his savagery went to the length of impiety. He had **eight hundred of his captives crucified** in the midst of the city, and their wives and children butchered before their eyes, while he looked on, drinking, with his concubines reclining beside him.”
- Publius Quinctilius Varus governed Syria from 7/6 BC until 4 BC with four legions under his command, where he was known for his harsh rule and high taxes. Josephus mentions the swift action of Varus against a messianic revolt in Judea after the death of Herod the Great in 4 BC. “**The number of those who were crucified on this charge was two thousand.**”

Josephus: Incidents of Crucifixion

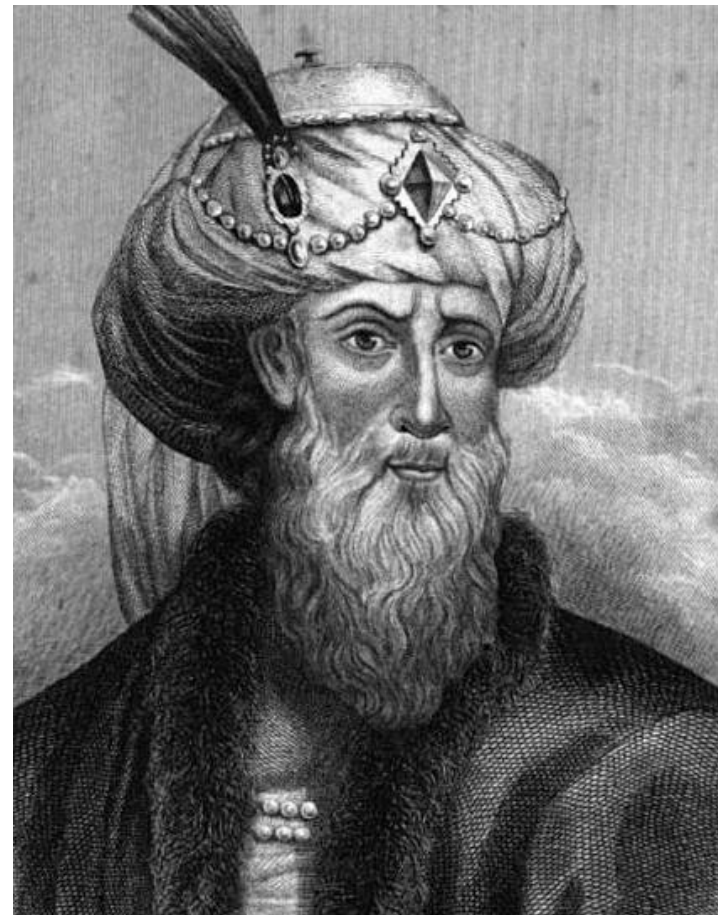
- Cumanus was procurator of Tiberius from AD 48-52. Josephus writes: “Under his administration disturbances broke out, resulting in another large loss of Jewish lives. Quadratus, governor of Syria, went to Caesarea where he **crucified all the prisoners** taken by Cumanus.”
- Nero (54-68 AD) appointed Felix to be the procurator of Judea. “Felix took prisoner Eleazar, the brigand (bandit) chief, who for twenty years had ravaged the country, with many of his associates, and sent them for trial to Rome. Of the **brigands whom he crucified**, and of the common people who were convicted of complicity with them and punished by him, **the number was incalculable.**”

Tacitus (c. 56-120 AD): *Annals*

“Christus, the founder of the name, had undergone the death penalty in the reign of Tiberius, by sentence of the procurator Pontius Pilate, and the pernicious superstition was checked for a moment, only to break out once more, not merely in Judea, the home of the disease, but in the capital itself, where all things horrible or shameful in the world collect and find a vogue. First, then, the confessed members of the sect were arrested; next, on their disclosures, vast numbers were convicted, not so much on the count of arson as for hatred of the human race. And derision accompanied their end: they were covered with wild beasts’ skins and torn to death by dogs; or they were fastened on crosses...” (*The Annals of Tacitus*).

The Siege of Jerusalem by Titus in AD 70

“By permission of (Caesar) Titus, I entered the Temple, where a great multitude of captive women and children had been imprisoned, and liberated all the friends and acquaintances whom I recognized, in number about a hundred and ninety; I took no ransom for their release and restored them to their former fortune. Once more, when I was sent by Titus Caesar with Cerealius and a thousand horses to a village called Tekoa, to prospect whether it was a



Flavius Josephus
37 BC – 100 AD



The Siege of Jerusalem by Titus in AD 70

suitable place for an entrenched camp, and on my return **saw many prisoners who had been crucified**, and recognized three of my acquaintances among them, I was cut to the heart and came and told Titus with tears what I had seen. He gave orders immediately that they should be taken down and receive the most careful treatment. **Two of them died in the physicians hands; the third survived.**”



Titus' Siege of Jerusalem, 70 AD

“His (Titus) main reason for not stopping the crucifixions was the hope that the spectacle might perhaps induce the Jews to surrender, for fear that continued resistance would involve them in a similar fate. The soldiers out of rage and hatred amused themselves by nailing their prisoners in different postures; and so great was their number, that space could not be found for the crosses nor crosses for the bodies” (Josephus, *Jewish War*, V, 451).



Pilate Washes His Hands

- “And when Pilate saw that he was accomplishing nothing, but rather that a riot was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the multitude, saying, ‘I am innocent of this Man’s blood; see to that yourselves’” (only reported by Matthew at 27:24).
- The literal Greek translation is: “**Innocent** am I of the blood from this man.”
- The Greek word for *innocent* means “without penalty, clear, scot-free” (Hendriksen), or “unpunished, free from a thing” (Liddell & Scott).
- Pilate’s symbolic gesture implied that Jesus was innocent. A heartless coward, he refused to take any responsibility for Jesus’ crucifixion.

Pilate Has Jesus Scourged

- “Then he (Pilate) released Barabbas for them; but Jesus he scourged and delivered over to be crucified” (Mt. 27:26; cf. Mk. 15:15).
- The Greek word for *scourged* is *phragello, v.*, to flog, scourge. The Latin is *flagellum, n.*, a whip, scourge.
- The flagellum was made of a handle to which were attached several cords or leather strips. Jagged pieces of bone or metal were affixed to the end of the cords.
- The victim was tied to a post and the blows given by a Roman soldier to the back and loins (sometimes even to the face and the bowels).
- “The plowers plowed upon my back; they made long their furrows” (Ps. 129:3).



Eusebius on Scourging

The first church historian, Eusebius (AD 263-339), reporting on the martyrdom of Polycarp and others, wrote: “For those standing around were struck with amazement at seeing them lacerated with scourges to their very blood and arteries, so that now the flesh concealed in the very inmost parts of the body, and the bowels themselves, were exposed to view. Then they were laid upon conch shells from the sea, and on sharp heads and points of spears on the ground, and after passing through every kind of punishment and torment, were at last thrown as food to wild beasts.”

Paul Almost Scourged

- “The commander ordered him (Paul) to be brought into the barracks, stating that he should be examined by scourging so that he might find out the reason why they were shouting against him that way. And when they had stretched him out with thongs, Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, ‘Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman and uncondemned?’ And when the centurion heard this, he went to the commander and told him, saying, ‘What are you about to do? For this man is a Roman’” (Acts 22:24-26).
- “Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned...” (II Cor. 11:24).



Florus Scourges and Crucifies Jews

From Josephus, we learn that the wicked Gessius Florus, appointed by Nero (AD 54-68) as procurator of Judea from AD 64-66, ordered his soldiers to attack, plunder, and massacre the citizens of Jerusalem: “The troops, whose lust for booty was thus backed by their general’s (Florus’) order, not only plundered the quarter which they were sent to attack, but plunged into every house and slaughtered the inmates. There ensued a stampede through the narrow alleys, massacre of all who were caught, every variety of pillage; many of the peaceable citizens were arrested and brought before Florus, who had them first scourged and then crucified. The total number of that day’s victims, including women and children, for even infancy received no quarter,



Florus Scourges and Crucifies Jews

amounted to about **three thousand six hundred**. The calamity was aggravated by the unprecedented character of the Romans' cruelty. For Florus ventured that day to do what none had ever done before, namely, to scourge before his tribunal and nail to the cross men of equestrian rank, men who, if Jews by birth, were at least invested with that Roman dignity" (Josephus, *Jewish War*, Book II, 305-308).



Jesus in Hypovolemic Shock

“*Hypo* means low, *vol* refers to volume, and *emic* means blood, so hypovolemic shock means the person is suffering the effects of losing a large amount of blood,’ the doctor explained. ‘This does four things. First, the heart races to try to pump blood that isn’t there; second, the blood pressure drops, causing fainting or collapse; third, the kidneys stop producing urine to maintain what volume is left; and fourth, the person becomes very thirsty as the body craves fluids to replace the lost blood volume....Jesus was already in serious to critical condition even before the nails were driven through his hands and feet.’”

- Alexander Metherell, MD, PhD

From *The Case for Christ* by Lee Strobel

Jesus Taken Into the Praetorium

After the scourging, the Roman cohort:

- Stripped Jesus
- Placed a scarlet robe on Him
- Wove a crown of thorns for His head
- Placed a reed in His right hand and mocked Him
- Spat on Him
- Beat Him on the head with the reed



The Crucifixion of Jesus Christ

- At 9:00 a.m. (the third hour, Mk. 15:25), the Roman cohort and procession reached Golgotha with Jesus carrying the *patibulum*.
- Jesus refused the wine mixed with myrrh (Mt. 27:34).
- The Roman soldiers nailed Jesus to the cross (Mt. 27:38).
- The inscription on the *titulus*, “Jesus the Nazarene, the King of the Jews” (INRI), was affixed to the cross (Jn. 19:19).
- The soldiers divided Jesus’ outer garments and made four parts, a part for every soldier, and also the seamless tunic (Jn. 19:23).
- The soldiers sat down and kept watch over Jesus (Mt. 27:36).



A Description of Crucifixion

“The unnatural position made every movement painful; the lacerated veins and crushed tendons throbbed with incessant anguish; the wounds, inflamed by exposure, gradually gangrened; the arteries – especially at the head and stomach – became swollen and oppressed with surcharged blood; and while each variety of misery went on gradually increasing, there was added to them the intolerable pang of burning and raging thirst; and all these physical complications caused an internal excitement and anxiety, which made the prospect of death itself – of death, the awful unknown enemy at whose approach man usually shudders most – bear the aspect of a delicious and exquisite release” (Frederick Farrar, *The Life of Christ*).



How A Crucified Person Dies

“Once a person is hanging in the vertical position, crucifixion is essentially an agonizingly slow death by asphyxiation.”

-Dr. Alexander Metherell



Rembrandt van Rijn
The Three Crosses, 1653
Rijksmuseum Amsterdam

C.S. Lewis



C.S. Lewis
1898-1963

“Compared with the development of man on this planet, the diffusion of Christianity over the human race seems to go like a flash of lightning – for two thousand years is almost nothing in the history of the universe....We are still teething. The outer world, no doubt, thinks just the opposite. It thinks we are dying of old age. But it has thought that very often before. Again and again it has thought Christianity was dying, dying by persecutions from



C.S. Lewis

without and corruptions from within, by the rise of Mohammedanism, the rise of the physical sciences, the rise of great anti-Christian revolutionary movements. But every time the world has been disappointed. Its first disappointment was over the crucifixion. The Man came to life again. In a sense – and I quite realize how frightfully unfair it must seem to them – that has been happening ever since. They keep on killing the thing He started: and each time, just as they are patting down the earth on its grave, they suddenly hear that it is still alive and has even broken out in some new place. No wonder they hate us” (*Mere Christianity*).





Oberammergau Passion Play

Up, pious souls, arise and go,
Burning with pain, remorse and thanks,
With me to Golgotha and see
What happened here for your redemption.
There dies the Mediator between God
And sinners, the atoning death.



Oberammergau Passion Play

Naked, only clothed with wounds,
Soon He will hang here on the cross for you.
The merciless feed their eyes
Wantonly on His torment.
And He, who thee, O sinner, loves,
Is silent, suffers, endures and forgives.



Oberammergau Passion Play

Up, pious souls, draw near the lamb,
Who freely gives Himself for you.
Behold Him on the tree of the cross.
See, hanging between murderers,
God's Son gives His blood.
And you shed not a tear for Him in return?



Oberammergau Passion Play

They hear Him pray aloud to His father
To forgive even His enemies;
And soon He sacrifices His life
So that we may escape eternal death.
A spear pierces through His side,
And opens His heart to us still more.

Staurogram or the Tau-Rho Symbol

