

Contemplations on the Significance of the Cross

Crucifixion, long thought to be the “invention” of the Roman Empire was in fact in use among the Egyptians in the Old Testament, *"Within three days Pharaoh will lift off your head from you and hang you on a tree and the birds will eat your flesh from you"* (Genesis 40:19). In the Sacred Scriptures, the Book of **Esther 7: 10** tells us that the Carthaginians and Persians also utilized crucifixion, *"So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the kings' wrath subsided."* It is commonly known that along with the Romans the Greeks had used crucifixion from the earliest of times. Many scholars think that the Jews learned the concept of crucifixion from the Romans.

Particularly in New Testament times, crucifixion was purposefully meant to be a demeaning way in which to die. It was an emblem of a disparaging slave or servants' death, and a murderers' punishment. It was reserved for the vilest of criminal acts. Degradation was an added dimension of the cruel infliction. The Cross was to all a symbol of the profoundest horror.

There are now thought to be 3 different forms of Crosses used during Biblical times for crucifixion. The first resembled the small letter "†," the second form the capital letter "T," and the third was in the form of an "X."

Most Biblical scholars believe the Cross in which the Lord Jesus Christ suffered upon was a Latin style Cross in the form of the small letter "†." The Latin Cross, "†," had an upright beam above the cross bar, on which a "title" could be placed. There was a projection from the central stem of the Cross, which the body of the sufferer could rest upon. This was not to provide occasional relief from suffering but the purpose of the projection was to prevent the weight of the body from tearing away the hands and wrist. Other scholars refer to the Lord Jesus Christ's Holy Cross as in the form of the capital letter, "T." No one alludes to His Cross as being in the form of the "X." St. Barnabas (c.70-130) writes, "The Cross was to express grace by the letter "T".

Victims were flogged and then forced to walk to the site of their impending death dragging the beam of the Cross in which they were to be hung on. No one could bear to carry the full weight of the heavy Crosses prepared for the purpose of crucifixion. The one to be crucified was also stripped naked of all his clothes to further add to the humiliation. At the designated crucifixion site the victim was nailed through his wrists and ankles to the wooden Cross, which they had been forced to drag.

Tertullian, a very educated Christian (c. 197) writes concerning the Lord Jesus Christ's crucifixion, *"He said unto him, 'Pass through the midst of Jerusalem and write the sign of "Tau" on the foreheads of the men who groan and grieve over all the enormities that are done in their midst"* (Ezekiel 9:4). Now the mystery of this sign was in various ways predicted, in which the foundation of life was prepared for mankind. The Greek letter "TAU" is equivalent to the English capital letter "T" which is in the shape of the Cross.

Death upon the Cross was meant to be mercilessly slow and agonizing. Death by crucifixion usually occurred from suffocation after the crucified became too exhausted to pull him up in order to breathe.

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Crucifixion could entail pain, dizziness, abdominal cramps, muscle cramps, thirst, starvation, fever, tetanus, tormenting crowds, and prey attracted to unattended wounds. It has been documented that the consequences of crucifixion could potentially be body rot as a result of the sun and rain or to be devoured by the birds and surrounding countryside's beasts.

With the Crown of Thorns upon the Lord Jesus Christ's Holy Head and a mocking crowd anxious to witness His death below Him, the humiliation of the Lord Jesus Christ was complete upon on the Holy Cross. The Cross as a painful instrument of death was documented in the Old Testament. The Cross was documented in the New Testament and in the writings of Church Fathers. The Cross was the bearer of the humiliation of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Cross remains with us today still bearing the same message as it did the day of the Lord's most Holy death. *"The message of the Cross"* wrote St. Paul, *"is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God"* (I Corinthians 1:18).

Besides the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, the Apostles St. Peter, St. Andrew, St. James the Less, and St. Simon were also crucified.

During these days of Holy Great Lent let us reverently remember the circumstances of our Lords' death and His great and unsurpassing love for us all. Let us all take a moment to lift up our eyes toward the Holy Cross to view the Author of our salvation, Our Lord Jesus Christ Crucified.

"Now there stood by the Cross of Jesus His mother, and His mothers' sister.... and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom He loved, He said to His mother, Woman behold your son! Then He said to the disciple, Behold your mother...after this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, I thirst...and they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop and put it to His mouth. When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said it is finished: and He bowed His head and gave up the spirit upon the Holy Cross" (St. John 19:22-30).