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The Crucifixion
First Corinthians 1: 18

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God (First Corinthians 1:18).

Crucifixion probably first began among the Persians. Alexander the Great introduced the practice to Egypt and Carthage, and the Romans appear to have learned of it from the Carthaginians. They had tried death by spear, by boiling in oil, impalement, stoning, strangulation, drowning, burning – and all had been found to be too quick. The Persians impaled the condemned (see my commentary on **Esther Bf – So They Impaled Haman on the Pole He Had Set Up for Mordecai**). That could be quick. They wanted a means of punishing criminals slowly, excruciatingly slowly – sometimes taking days to die – so they devised the cross. A secondary consideration was nudity. This added to the shame of the evildoer and, at the same time, made him helpless before the thousands of insects of the air, while carrion birds and the small animals usually held back until the crucified was dead.



Although the Romans did not invent **crucifixion**, they perfected it as a form of torture and capital punishment that was designed to produce slow death with maximum pain and suffering. The Roman world was largely unanimous in their belief that **crucifixion** was a horrific and disgusting business. The relative scarcity to references in Roman literature reflects their disgust for it. The cultured world

wanted nothing to do with it, and as a rule kept quite about it. The Romans had taken away the right of the Jews to exercise the death penalty by stoning by the time Jesus was born.

Crucifixion was also a means of waging war and securing peace, of wearing down rebellious cities under siege, of breaking the will of conquered peoples and of bringing mutinous troops or unruly provinces under control. It was one of the most disgraceful and cruel methods of execution and usually was reserved only for slaves (Rome had a huge slave population that it needed to keep in check), foreigners, revolutionaries, and the vilest of criminals. Roman law usually protected Roman citizens from **crucifixion**, except perhaps in the case of desertion by soldiers or high treason by others.[1594]

When man elevates his own wisdom he automatically attempts to lower **God's** wisdom, which looks like **foolishness**, because it conflicts with his own thinking. That **ADONAI** would take human form, be **crucified**, and raised in order to provide forgiveness for our sins and entrance into heaven is an ideas far too simple, foolish and humbling for the natural mind to accept. That one man (even the Son of **God**) could die on a piece of wood on a nondescript hill in a nondescript part of the world and thereby determine the destiny of every person who has ever lived seems **foolish**. It allows no place for our merit, our attainment, our understanding or our pride. This **message of the cross is foolishness** (*moria,* from which we get *moron*). It is moronic, absolute nonsense, to unbelievers who rely on their own wisdom – **to those who are perishing**. Human wisdom can never understand **the cross**.[1595]

The cross was also a highly offensive matter for the first believers and imposed a burden on them in their preaching. The enemies of **the Way (Acts 9:2, 19:9** and **23, 22:4, 24:14** and **22)**, always referred to the death of **Jesus Christ** with great emphasis and pleasure. Gnosticism, which threatened the first believers, eliminated the problem of **the cross** by saying that **the Son of God** had only *seemed* to be **crucified**. But in reality, **He** did not really suffer. So **the cross** was both scandalous and a paradox at the same time.

It should be noted that the Torah in particular, and Jewish values in general, strongly condemned execution on **the stake**. Even in the Jewish court cases in which forty lashes might be fairly given, the religious authorities often held back one symbolic lash to reflect the Torah's call for mercy **(Deuteronomy 25:3; Second Corinthians 11:24)**. **In the most extreme capital cases, the Talmud**

(based upon the Torah) specified only four possible means of execution – stoning, burning, strangling, or slaying by the sword (Tractate Sanhedrin 52a). In addition, these could be used only if they did not desecrate the physical body since all people, even criminals, are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). They were just a means of execution. Even burning was usually done only after the person had already been executed. There could be no cruel or unusual punishment, a value carried over in our Western society today.

Since capital punishment was such an egregious practice, the Sanhedrin ultimately stopped implementing it altogether, as reflected in **the declaration of Rabbi Tarfon and Rabbi Akiva that, "Had we belonged to the Sanhedrin, during Judea's independence, no person would ever have been executed" (Tractate Makkot 1:10).** Of course, under the first-century Roman occupation, the right to carry out capital punishment was taken away from the Great Sanhedrin.

It is important to understand that Jews did not physically carry out **the crucifixion** of **Yeshua**, for two simple reasons. First, they lacked the authority to do so, and second, **crucifixion** was not the Jewish means of execution. Clearly there was a plan in place by the Great Sanhedrin (**to see link click Lg – The Great Sanhedrin**) to hand **Messiah** over to the Romans, and for that they must be held accountable (were they ever!). But it would not be Jews who drove the nails into the cross.[1596]

*Dear **Heavenly Father**: I thank **You** that **You** have purchased me from the slave market of sin and darkness, and brought me into **Your** own Kingdom of light. I joyfully announce I belong to **You**. I renounce the lie that I'm unworthy to be **Your** child and that **You** don't love me. I accept and proclaim the truth that **You** loved me and died for me while I was still a sinner. I am now alive **in Christ**, I have been bought with a price, and I belong to **You** for all eternity. I commit myself and my body to **You** as a living sacrifice, that I may glorify **You**. In **Jesus'** precious name I pray. Amen, **He** is faithful.*[1597]

1 cross + 3 nails = 4 given

That old rugged cross is now a new tree of life.