

Christ in Prophecy
Life in Bible Times 3: “Crucifixion Techniques”

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Opening

Dr. Reagan: One thousand years before Jesus was born, King David of Israel wrote a prophetic poem called Psalm 22 in which he prophesied that the Messiah would die by having His hands and feet pierced. Now at the time David wrote those words, the method of Jewish execution was by stoning, and it would be 700 years before the Romans would develop crucifixion as a method of execution. What were the specific methods of execution? Why was crucifixion considered to be the most torturous death a person could experience? What did Jesus really suffer as He underwent the process of crucifixion? For the answers to these questions and more, stay tuned.

Program

Dr. Reagan: Greetings in the name of Jesus our blessed hope and welcome to *Christ in Prophecy*. This is the third in a series of programs about life in Bible times. Now in our first program we took a look at what it was like to live a nomadic lifestyle in the time of Abraham and even in the time of Jesus. In fact, there are still Bedouins in the Middle East who live the same sort of nomadic lifestyle to this day. It is not at all unusual to see Bedouin tents along the highway between Jerusalem and Jericho. The only difference between now and Bible times is that you will often see a TV antenna sticking up through the top of the tent. It's usually connected to a television set that's run by a car battery.

Now, last week we took a look at the Passover meal, how it was instituted, how it was celebrated in the first century, and how it became the basis of what we call the Lord's Supper today. In the process we took a detailed look at Leonardo Davinci's painting of the Last Supper that Jesus had with his disciples which of course was a Passover meal. We saw that the painting was incorrect in all its details and that the event looked more like the painting you are now seeing on the screen with everyone reclining around a U shaped table. This painting was done by Marilyn Todd Daniels and you can get a print of it through her website address you see on the screen. Woodsoninstitute.com. I would

also like to encourage you to visit the website of the Bible Times Learning Center, which is located in a suburb of Jerusalem called Ein Karem. That website address is also on the screen it is bibletimesonline.org, and the director, Annie Thrasher, would appreciate your words of encouragement and any financial support you can supply. And now, let's go to the Bible Times Learning Center.

Dr. Reagan: Greetings in the name of Jesus our blessed hope and welcome to *Christ in Prophecy*. Once again, this week, we're going to be taking a look at how people lived in Bible times. We are here in Ein Karem, a suburb of Jerusalem, at the Bible Times Learning Center, and here is the executive director of the center, Annie Thrasher. Annie thanks for having us back.

Annie Thrasher: Thank you.

Dr. Reagan: And she is going to give us a teaching right now concerning crucifixion. The techniques of crucifixion and other aspects of it as it existed in the time of Jesus. It's all yours Annie.

Annie Thrasher: Crucifixion was a Roman method of torture. Many people thinking of Jesus' death think, "Ah, it's a way of killing people." But first and foremost it was a way to bring people to torture. The Roman executioners were very, very, very good about how many stripes could someone get with a whip before someone was completely incapacitated. They were very understanding about where to place a nail so as to hold a body and yet not break a vein or artery that would cause complete loss of blood and death too soon. So when we think of these Roman executions it's not just at the time of Jesus. It was in the whole of the Roman world and it began close to a hundred years before Jesus and several hundred years after. But we're going to talk specifically about what happened to Jesus on that last week of his life, well, the last day, on the crucifixion, and for that I need some help.

Sakher is going to assist me in this teaching because well, crucifixion takes more than one person. Crucifixion as I said before was a means of torture. And it would always begin with a beating, a severe beating. Now, as torture goes, 39 lashes was considered merciful, so the whip of the Romans was multi-striped. Usually the ends were filled with

glass or pottery or metal and the idea was not just to hurt the person by impact, but in fact to strip the flesh. So, I'm going to let you be my example. So if you'll come over here, put your back through this, so the victim would be tied to a post, like this. And the swinging would go over the shoulders and down and then it would go over the next shoulder and down. So the idea was that this would go from his shoulders to his knees, from his shoulders to his knees. Now, imagine 19 times, times 3, times 4. That's what each lash meant. So the stripes were literally ripping the flesh from the body. But now, if 19 wasn't enough, then the balance of that would go on the back. So the victim having been revived I'm sure is then shoved against the stump and then the same action from the shoulders to the knees, from the shoulders to the knees, unmercifully doing this until the flesh was just flayed. Now, in the case of the Gospels, we know that Jesus was in fact beaten by Ponchos Pilot. And from there it seems to indicate that He was taken to a place where He was turned over to the soldiers. So, I'm going to turn this over to Sakher because I would like him to tell you about the game of the king.

Sakher: The Bible tell us about the soldiers, the Roman soldiers, giving the Lord a thorny crown, and we read that they used to come in front of Him dealing with Him as a king. We do believe that that was a game. We know about twenty different games that Roman soldiers used to play in the time. Most of these games carved on Antonia fortress pavement. Some of them we still could see to this moment. We don't know about most of these games but the one that they used with the Lord we know it very well. That's called in Latin, Satorna, Satorna means one day king. It goes like this, three soldiers would play it. If I win, the other two would deal with me as a king. I am the king of today. Whatever I say, they have to obey I give orders. You make me massage, you cook, you do this you do this. They not supposed to complain or refuse. But in the end of the day, they will kill me. Now, please don't ask why and how, I don't know, and hear I just remember the Russian roulette game. It's a crazy game but it's a game.

The Romans when they saw soldiers killing each other, this easy, they said, why don't we change some rules of this game. Let's do this, two soldiers would play with a prisoner, and if the prisoner win, let's deal with him as a king, let's give him a good time, because we're going to finish him at the end of the day. So maybe, I'm saying maybe, that was a game.

Annie Thrasher: Well, we know that Jesus was given a robe and He was given a crown and He was given a staff, so it seems that that's possible that He was in fact made the king for the day.

Sakher: That's right. That's 100 percent right. But please remember in biblical days, a person would cover his body with three pieces of cloth, the head cover, the sandals, and the robe, that works also as underwear. And here come three soldiers, now he's going to die, so he doesn't need these clothes, let's take it. Now, Herod Antipas gave the Lord a robe, the royal one, when he heard that he is calling above himself, He is the king of the Jews. So, he gave Him a royal robe, and He'll become a person with four pieces. Three soldiers would take three pieces, each one would take a piece, but there's an extra one, so the idea was, let's play and see who is going to win this good piece.

Annie Thrasher: So, the prophecy about rolling the dice for the robe comes true.

Sakher: It all fits the prophecy.

Annie Thrasher: I want you to explain perhaps about the Roman cross. My understanding, that it is not what we see in the paintings from the renaissance but rather the cross is a cross beam, is this true?

Sakher: That's 100 percent true. But let me tell you something very important. There was a message behind this. Now, remember, the crucifixion as you said, is a Roman punishment, not a Jewish punishment. Because Jewish people would stone the person who would teach against God and against the Shabbat, against the temple. Now, they used to crucify the people right on the main streets, next to the main streets, And they used to plant trees, they I mean the Romans, plant trees mostly olive trees on both sides of the highways. So you go there with your children walking toward the city, and you hear people both sides screaming, "Please take me down please help me." And you don't want your kids to see or hear this you block their eyes and ears. This is the message, if you're not with us, you'll end like this.

Now, the cross, we read about like three kinds of crosses or mainly two kinds of crosses. It might be a tree, look like a cross, or a tree just like this. So the beam that He carry

which is like 50 kg, they put it in this way, and here is a cross, probably this is what they used for the Lord Jesus.

Annie Thrasher: So this one here on the ground might be one kind that He might carry because the Gospel says He carried the cross, He carried it to the place of crucifixion and then it would be lifted up onto a higher post so that it could be seen from farther away.

Sakher: That's right. And please remember that the highest cross it was only three meters. Notice that Middle Eastern people are small, they're not giants they don't need very high cross like the one we see in the movie. The lowest one was a meter and a half. Now please remember it's not place where you have fun because Romans want you to suffer a lot. We read about crucifying two to three people on one tree sometimes.

Annie Thrasher: And, tell me about the length of time I understand that type of crucifixion that the Romans practiced especially in this part of the world, should last the people being alive for three days?

Sakher: Three to seven days.

Annie Thrasher: Three to seven days on the cross?

Sakher: Yes, we read this in the bible. According to the position that they put you on the cross, you know, nailing your hands and your legs.

Annie Thrasher: Well, let's take a look at this cross here this would be like an olive tree that was set by the side of the road.

Sakher: Exactly. And it looks like a cross. So what they do, they make a seat for the person to sit here, not to relax. Then since he's fighting, he doesn't want to die they use ropes to hold him, his arms, waist and legs. Then it is the nail, nail look like this, going through a piece of wood like washer.

Annie Thrasher: Now, how do they know about the hard wood?

Sakher: In 1968 in Jerusalem in a Jewish neighborhood called Giv'at ha-Mivtar, it's very close to the Hebrew university, in Mt. of Olives, they discovered in two ossuaries...

Annie Thrasher: Like a bone box?

Sakher: A bone box, a stone bone box. And one written, it said Jewish names written on the ossuaries. The first one belonged to Simon who built the temple in Jesus' time first century AD. Then the second one belonged to somebody called Yohanan ben Ha'gol. John son of Ezekiel, and when they opened it they found something very interesting. They found the ankle bone they found the nail I'm telling you about going through a piece of acacia wood like washer, going through the bone, coming out from here another piece of olive wood sticking to the nail from the other side. And they also discovered that the nail went through a nut inside the olive wood, so the parents or the family could not pull the nail out, they put the bone with the nail as it is in the ossuary so we know exactly even the shape and the size of the nails.

Annie Thrasher: Wow. So let's see how that would look.

Sakher: The person would take position like this. Then use ropes sometimes to hold him.

Annie Thrasher: Okay, alright.

Sakher: Remember that the nail should go here. Not here because he might pull and you know, cut through.

Annie Thrasher: Unlike the painting that we get so much of our history from, then this indeed would go through this area here, between the two bones, between the two bones and not tearing any arteries.

Sakher: And no way to take it off.

Annie Thrasher: And no way to take it off. Okay let me see the other arm.

Sakher: The other arm would be like, exactly like this.

Annie Thrasher: Now, I understand the practice was to pull the arms as far as possible because that already limits the depth of your breath, so you can only breath short breaths. Is that true?

Sakher: That's 100 percent right. And if you see, the leg would come this way.

Annie Thrasher: Well, let's see, if the leg would come this way then that would indicate that this would go, as you said, through the bone here.

Sakher: Exactly.

Annie Thrasher: So either the spike was long enough to go through two ankles, or the ankles were on either side of the tree.

Sakher: We do believe that it's two nails, one on each side of the tree.

Annie Thrasher: So, the tradition then would be two nails through the wrists, and two nails through the ankles, one on each side of the tree.

Sakher: Exactly, Now this position would give you since you could push yourself up, leaning on the nails, up to breath, down to sit, down to sit. This position would give you a chance to live between three to seven days.

Annie Thrasher: We read in the gospels that there was a thief and a murder on either side of Jesus. And the Romans wanted to hurry this up because the holiday was coming, Passover was coming, it had to be finished. Now, is it traditional then if they want to kill you more quickly, they would come and just break the knees?

Sakher: That's right. Remember that as soon as you're put on the cross, nobody would take you down. So it would take you three or seven days, you're going to die in the end. So what they do, families or parents waiting for the person to die to take the body,

nobody come they just throw the body in the garbage. Now what if the person fainted? They won't release him. It should be 100 percent dead. So what the soldiers would do, take the dagger and stab the person. If he's still alive he might move or shout so what they do just to finish him, they would bring big hammer and break the two knees that he use to push himself up to breath, and go down. And this way, the person would fall down, suffocate and die quickly. Now what happened with the Lord, that when they stabbed Him He was dead already. But they did this to the other two thieves they were still alive.

Annie Thrasher: So what I'm understanding you to say, that is with the murderer and the thief at the left and the right of Jesus, the Romans came in and broke their knees, and there was shock that Jesus appeared to already be dead. And then the Roman took the spear and speared Jesus and out came water and blood, he was already dead, right?

Sakher: That's right. Remember please, that the whip you talked about that made a lot of holes in the body, that the Lord lost most of His blood that He become very, very weak, could not carry the beam, the cross, and when they stabbed Him here, water and blood came out because there was no, lack of blood in his body.

Annie Thrasher: Well, let me see, there's been controversy for years about who killed Jesus. Yes?

Sakher: Yes.

Annie Thrasher: Yes, but from what I see He chose the time because He said before I lay down my life and I can pick it up again, And then he also said, "It was finished." And then to His Father He said, "Into your hands do I commit my Spirit." So He died before the bones were broken in His knees.

Sakher: Well, you've got to follow the prophecies also, remember, He is the Lamb of God this is what John the Baptist also said. And He died on the cross at the same moment that Jewish people would start killing the Passover lamb. Passover lamb, first you drain the blood, and this what they did with the whip, most of His blood drained out.

Passover lamb should be unblemished. So they did not break the bones, because the way you kill it, the way you eat it, you just take the meat, never break any bones. This is exactly what happened with the Lord Jesus.

Conclusion

Dr. Reagan: Welcome back to our studio in Dallas, Texas. I hope the teaching you just heard from Annie Thrasher has been a blessing to you. There are a couple of things that Annie alluded to that I'd like to develop in more detail. The first concerns where the crucifixions took place. Because of the immensely popular hymn the old rugged cross, most people have the idea that crucifixions were conducted in very remote places. That's because the hymn refers to the cross of Jesus as being on a hill far away. Folks, nothing could be further from the truth. Crucifixions were always conducted in very public places. The crosses were usually places along the sides of major highways so that they could be seen by the maximum number of people. The point is, that the Romans wanted to make it very clear to the people what would happen to anyone who dared to challenge Roman authority. Can you imagine the horror of walking down a road with your children that is lined on both sides with crosses containing dying men? Crying out for help? And moaning in agony? It must have been ghastly. I think it's interesting that just as Leonardo Davinci's painting of the Last Supper gives a completely wrong impression of what the event was like, in like manner, the great hymn, the *Old Rugged Cross*, gives us an incorrect idea about how crucifixions were conducted. Yes, great art that inspires our souls can be historically inaccurate.

Now the second item that Annie Thrasher mentioned that I'd like to comment on is the question of who killed Jesus. Now folks, this is a very important question and one that we need to consider carefully. Historically, the church has blamed the Jews, accusing them of deicide and branding them as Christ-killers, and this accusation has been the source of much anti-Semitism throughout history. The Bible spreads the blame to groups other than the Jews, for example, here in acts chapter 4, verse 27, the apostle Peter proclaimed that Jesus was crucified by "Herod, and Ponchos Pilot, along with the Gentiles and the people of Israel." So who were the ones responsible for the death of Jesus according to the Scriptures, the Jewish King Herod the Roman governor Ponchos Pilot, and the Gentiles and Jews of Jerusalem. But you know what? There were many

more people than that who were actually responsible for the death of Jesus. Spiritually speaking, every person who has ever lived, including you and me, is responsible in part for the death of Jesus. That's because Jesus died for the sins of the world, and all of us are sinners. That's the reason that when many of the great Christian painters throughout the Middle Ages painted scenes of the cross, they always painted themselves into their pictures standing at the foot of the cross, encouraging the mob as they mocked the dying Savior. The fact of the matter is, that we all have the blood of Jesus on our hands, but the good news, is that same blood makes it possible for us to be reconciled to God our Father if we put our faith in Jesus as our Lord and Savior.

At the last supper, Jesus referred to one of the wine glasses symbolically in the following way, He said, "For this is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." And the apostle Paul expressed it in this way. "Having now been justified by His blood, the blood of Jesus, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him." Here's how the apostle John put it in First John chapter 1 verse 7. He said, "If we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His son cleanses us from all sins. "

Have you put your faith in Jesus as your Lord and Savior? If not, why not? Salvation is a free gift of God's grace that comes through faith in Jesus as your Lord and Savior. I urge you to reach out to God in faith, confess that you're a sinner, accept Jesus as your Savior, and ask God to save you. There is not anything you can do to earn salvation it is a gift of God's grace, and please, do not allow Satan to convince you that you are unworthy of God's love and His salvation. The Bible teaches there is no sin so dark, so terrible, that it can separate you from the love of God, in Jesus Christ. If you decide to accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior, seek out a Bible believing and Christ exalting church where you can confess your faith publicly and manifest that faith in baptism. Then, get involved in a Bible study. Get involved in a Bible study group so that you can start growing in the image of Jesus.

Well, that's our program for this week. Next week the Lord willing, we'll be back at the Bible Times Learning Center in Ein Karem, Israel with our hostess Annie Thrasher, to talk about first century burial customs. I think you'll find the program to be both fascinating and enlightening. I know that it will give you some new insights about the

burial and resurrection of Jesus. Until next week, this is Dave Reagan speaking for Lamb and Lion Ministries saying, "Look up, be watchful, for our redemption is drawing near!"

End of Program