

I. Introduction

A. The Passion of Jesus is central to Christian identity.

The Passion of Jesus—the trial, suffering, and execution of Jesus—is central to Christian identity. In fact, next Wednesday is “Ash Wednesday,” the beginning of the 40 days of Lent leading up to Good Friday and then Easter. For 40 days, the ancient Church and many contemporary Churches fast and lament the death of Christ. The Passion of Jesus is central to Christian identity.

B. Mel Gibson’s new movie, *The Passion of the Christ*

Next Wednesday is “Ash Wednesday” and it is no coincidence that Mel Gibson’s new movie, *The Passion of the Christ*, is making its debut on that very day.¹



The Passion will open on Feb 25th, Ash Wednesday, all across the US. *The Passion* is Mel Gibson’s vivid and graphically intensive rendition of the last 12 hours of the life of Christ. Major Hollywood movie studios would not touch the film, because Gibson planned to use Latin and Aramaic without English subtitles and because there were allegations of anti-Semitism from the Anti-Defamation League and other Jewish Groups. Without support, Gibson sank \$25 million of his own money into the project and found a tiny film distributor, Newmarket Films, to help.

Movie reviewers, who have seen advanced screenings, say that the film is one of the best, if not the best, film they have ever seen. If one can sit through the gore and violence, the impact is overwhelming. [See overhead for the following comments]

Pope John Paul II saw the film and said: “It is as it was.”

Billy Graham said: "After watching *The Passion of the Christ* , I feel as if I have actually been there ... The film is faithful to the Bible's teaching that we are all responsible for Jesus' death, because we have all sinned."

Alan Sereboff, a Jewish screenwriter, said, "As a Jew I left the movie feeling a greater sense of friendship and closeness to my Christian brothers and sisters than I ever thought imaginable."

Jody Dean (writer for the Dallas/Ft. Worth Anchor) wrote:

There is nothing in my existence ... that could have prepared me for what I saw on screen last night.

¹ The official website is www.thepassionofthechrist.com.

This is not a movie that anyone will "like". I don't think it's a movie anyone will "love". It certainly doesn't "entertain". There isn't even the sense that one has just watched a movie. What it is...an *experience* - on a level of primary emotion that is scarcely comprehensible. ... No one will eat popcorn during this film. Some may not eat for days after they've seen it.²

C. Approaching the Passion of Christ as historians

Two thousand years after the passion of Jesus, the story is still central to our lives and our world. Tonight, we are going to play the role of historians and try to answer some important questions:

- Why was Jesus killed?
- Do the Gospels provide reliable accounts of Jesus' final week?
- What did Jesus think he was doing when he went to Jerusalem?

II. The Last Week of Jesus

When we look at the final days of Jesus, the four Gospels are in complete agreement: the climax of Jesus' mission or life was a final visit to Jerusalem and Pontius Pilate executed Jesus during the Passover 30 C.E. A glance at the four Gospels is sufficient to show that they work with a common framework for the final period—the general chronology of the last week of Jesus is not in question.

A. The Chronology of the Last Week

All four gospels exhibit the same basic passion sequence [need fancy overhead chart]

- Jesus enters Jerusalem at Passover time
- Jesus disrupts the Temple operations
- Jesus teaches in the Temple area
- Jewish authorities conspire to kill Jesus
- Judas' betrayal of Jesus
- Jesus' last supper with disciples on evening of arrest
- Jewish authorities arrest Jesus that night
- Jesus appears before the Jewish authorities during the night
- Jesus appears before the Roman Governor Pontius Pilate the next morning
- Jesus is crucified with a placard saying "King of the Jews"
- Jesus is buried by Joseph of Arimathea

Why do the Gospels share this common framework? The most obvious explanation is that the framework was fixed early on in the oral traditioning process. That is, this common framework was rooted in the memory of the earliest disciples of Jesus and they passed it on. There are no good reasons to doubt the general framework of events.

²Jody Dean, the Dallas/Ft. Worth Anchor, CBS News; <http://www.religiontoday.com/faith/1242963.html>.

B. Jesus' symbolic actions ³

What did Jesus think he was doing when he went to Jerusalem? Surely Jesus knew that both the Jewish and Roman authorities were going to be there in force. Jesus' symbolic actions provide some indication.

We should note that symbolic actions were part of the Hebrew Prophets' repertoire.

- Isaiah walked naked and barefoot for 3 years as a sign against Egypt & Ethiopia (Isa 20:3)
- Jeremiah was told to break a pot and proclaim that the Temple would be destroyed (Jer 19:1-13)
- Jeremiah also wore a yoke to indicate that Judah would submit to Babylon (Jer 27-28)
- Ezekiel performed complicated actions, which required a lot of explanation, such a lying for long periods of time first on one side, then on the other (Ezek 4-5; 12; 24)

Jesus was also a Jewish prophet and part of his repertoire including symbolic actions. For example:

- His use of the number twelve when speaking of his disciples—twelve tribes of Israel
- His miracles & exorcisms symbolized the defeat of evil and the arrival of the K. of G.

C. Jesus' three symbolic actions during the final week ⁴

The Gospels tell us that Jesus performed three symbolic actions during the final week of his life.

1. First: Riding into Jerusalem on a donkey

Matthew 21:1-11. 21:1 When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, 21:2 saying to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. 21:3 If anyone says anything to you, just say this, 'The Lord needs them.' And he will send them immediately." 21:4 This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet, saying,

21:5 "Tell the daughter of Zion, Look, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey." [Zech 9:9]

21:6 The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; 21:7 they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 21:8 A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.... 21:10 When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, "Who is this?" 21:11 The crowds were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee." (NRSV)

First, was this *prophecy historicized*? That is, did the Gospel writer read the prophecy of Zech 9:9 and then *create* the story around the prophecy? If so, then the event never happened. It was prophecy historicized.

- Did the events surrounding the death of Jesus *fulfill prophetic* passages in the Hebrew Bible?

³ See E. P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (London: Penguin, 1993) 253-264.

⁴ See E. P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (London: Penguin, 1993) 253-264.

- Or did the early Christians create details in the passion stories from passages in the Hebrew Bible, forming *prophecy historicized*?

In general, mainline scholars do not see the correspondences as prophecy fulfilled. Rather, the correspondences appear because early Christians used the Hebrew Bible as they told the story of Jesus' death.

Second, was it *prophecy enacted*? Some scholars, like E.P. Sanders, believe that Jesus was familiar with the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9 (as were many other Jews at that time) and then decided to fulfill the prophecy. This is, it was not *prophecy historicized*, but *prophecy enacted*.

If Jesus did perform this symbolic act of riding a donkey into Jerusalem, what was the meaning of this action for Jesus? Sanders believes that Jesus himself read the prophecy and then decided to fulfill it. As such, Jesus implicitly declared himself to be *the promised messianic king*. If so, then Jesus saw himself as Yahweh's agent or king who would restore Jerusalem as Yahweh's city. Jesus was enacting Yahweh's return to Zion.

2. Second: Disrupting the Temple operations

Mark 11:15-18. 11:15 Then they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling and those who were buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of those who sold doves; 11:16 and he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. 11:17 He was teaching and saying, "Is it not written,

**'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations [Jer 7:11]?'
But you have made it a den of robbers [Isa 56:7].'**

11:18 And when the chief priests and the scribes heard it, they kept looking for a way to kill him; for they were afraid of him, because the whole crowd was spellbound by his teaching. (NRSV)

Mark mentions two prophecies quoted by Jesus (Jer 7:11 and Isa 56:7). Again, it could be *prophecy historicized* or *Jesus may have said them*. Whether this is prophecy historicized or Jesus actual said them, is less important than answering two questions.

a. Did Jesus cause a disturbance in the Temple?

Did Jesus go into the Temple during the last week of his life and cause a ruckus. Did he disrupt Temple activities or in some way threaten or make menacing gestures toward the Temple and its overseers?

The data suggests that Jesus caused a disturbance in the Temple. This would provide the immediate antecedent cause for Jesus arrest and execution. That is, Jesus' disruptions of the Temple provoked the authorities to arrest and kill him.

We find *multiple attestation* for this event:

- The Synoptic Gospels attribute to Jesus a *prediction* that the Temple would be destroyed (Mk 13:1).

- They attribute to his accusers at this trial the testimony that he *threatened to destroy the Temple* (Mk 14:58; Mt 26:61).
- During the crucifixion scene, onlookers taunted Jesus and said, “Aha! You who would destroy the Temple.... Save yourself and come down from the cross!” (Mk 15:29; Mt 27:40).
- John’s Gospel (a separate tradition) says that Jesus’ opponents thought Jesus threatened the Temple (Jn 2:19-20)
- In Acts, Stephen was accused of saying that “Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place (the Temple)” (Acts 6:14).

b. Was Jesus’ disturbance in the Temple a *cleansing* (trying to start a reform) or was it a *prediction of its destruction*?

1. It is possible that Jesus saw the Temple system as corrupt and was trying to start a reform movement to root out the corruption. In that case, we can call this a cleansing of the Temple.

2. However, Sanders thinks it should not be regarded as a cleansing of the Temple. Rather, Jesus’ disruption of the Temple symbolized the coming destruction of the Temple. The Temple’s usefulness was over.

The Temple was central to Jewish life: Temple tax, agricultural tithes, minor agricultural offerings (first fruits), redemption of first-born sons and animals, sin and guilt offerings, festivals, and other miscellaneous offers all took place in the Temple. Had Jesus thought that the entire system was corrupt, Sanders believes that we would have more material pointing in that direction (Jesus paid Temple tax in Mt 17:24-27).

3. Sanders believes that Jesus was making a *prognostication* that the Temple would be destroyed by the Romans. Jesus overturned the tables in the Temple to symbolize the coming destruction of the Temple.

4. In Mark 13:1, Jesus predicted the *complete* destruction of the Temple—not one stone would be left standing. However, we know that part of the Temple still stands today—the Wailing Wall. When “prophecies” are written after the event, the prophecy and the event are in perfect harmony. But, here they are not. That means that Jesus *really did predict* the destruction of the Temple before it was destroyed in 70 AD. Jesus probably thought that God would destroy the existing Temple as part of the full arrival of the Kingdom of God when a New Eschatological Temple would be built—a Temple “not built with human hands” (Mk 14:58; Mt 26:61).

3. Third: The Last Supper

Mark 14:22 While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, “**Take; this is my body.**” 14:23 Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. 14:24 He said to them, “**This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.**” 14:25 Truly I tell you, **I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.**” (NRSV)

1. Markus Borg is skeptical about Jesus speaking the “words of institution” over the bread and wine at Jesus’ last meal.⁵ Borg argues that the world look like an early Christian ritualization of the death of Jesus.

2. In contrast, James Dunn argues that the words spoken by Jesus is firm in the memory of the earliest Christians.⁶ Even though there are indications of liturgical development, there is also a *core memory* of what Jesus said.

We have dual attestation. There are two distinct forms, one in Mark/Matthew and the other in Luke/Paul.

We can see that he regarded the meal as symbolic and as pointing to the future kingdom. This was Jesus’ last symbolic gesture. And the saying makes it highly probably that Jesus knew that he was a marked man. This means that Jesus anticipated his rejection of his message in Jerusalem and, more than that, Jesus anticipated his own death.

4. Conclusion

The three symbolic acts all point to the coming kingdom and Jesus’ own role in that process. He will suffer and die, but he will also be God’s King or Messiah when the Kingdom is fully revealed.

We can also see that there is general agreement—in broad strokes—about what happened during the last week of Jesus’ life. However, regarding the particulars, we cannot be as certain because of the differences and difficulties that emerge in a close comparison of the Synoptic Gospels. The evidence follows.

III. Passion Narrative Difficulties⁷

Certain features of the passion narratives makes the historian’s task more difficult:

A. Gospels view events as fulfillment of Scripture

- Dividing Jesus garments fulfills Ps 22:18 (Mk 15:24 & Jn 19:24)
- Pilate washing hands recall Deut 21:6-9 (Mt 27:24)
- Jesus’ betrayal by Judas fulfills Ps 41:9 (Mk 14:21)
- Jesus alludes to OT scripture—Exod 24:8, Jer 31:31, Zech 9:11—when he describes the significance of the bread and wine at the last supper (Mk 14:22-25)
- The scattering of disciples fulfills Zech 13:7 (Mk 14:27)

B. Seven saying on the cross echo or quote scripture

	Matt	Mark	Luke	John
1. Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they’re doing.			23:34	
2. Woman, here is your son. Here is your mother.				19:26-27

⁵ Marcus Borg and N.T. Wright, *The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions* 1998:87.

⁶ James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 2003: 229-31, 804-5.

⁷ For following, see W. Barnes Tatum, *In Quest of Jesus* (Revised and Enlarged Edition, Louisville: John Knox, 1999) 218-231.

3. Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.			23:43	
4. <i>Eloi, Eloi lama sabachthani</i> (My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?) [Ps 22:1]	27:46	15:34		
5. I thirst. [Ps 69:21]				19:28
6. It is finished.				19:30
7. Father, into your hands I place my spirit. [Ps 31:5]			23:46	

What is stunning is that only one of the “last words” is attested by more than one author. The uncomfortable conclusion probably has to be that most of the words from the cross are additions or elaborations by early Christians. That is, it appears that early Christians felt the freedom to add scriptural allusions to the crucifixion scene to bring out a spiritually edifying character. Jesus’ death was remembered as fulfilling scriptural types.

C. Tendency to record traditions that echo scripture in more subtle ways

- Washing of Pilate’s hands (Matt 27:24 = Deut. 21:6-9)
- Crucifixion of Jesus (Mk 15:24; Jn 19:23 = Ps 22:16)
- Offering vinegar to Jesus (Mk 15:36; Jn 19:28-30 = Ps 69:21)
- Spitting at Jesus while he is beaten (Mk 14:65, 15:19 = Isa 50:6)
- Wagging of heads in derision by those walking by cross (Mk 15:29-30 = Ps 22:7)
- Words of mockery hurled at Jesus while on cross (Mt 27:43 = Ps 22:8)
- Gazing on cross from afar by his acquaintances (Lk 23:49 = Ps 38:11)

D. Tendency to shift responsibility for Jesus’ death from the Romans to the Jews

Mark: Pilate only reluctantly hands Jesus over to be crucified (Mk 15:10)

Matt: Repeats Mark, but (a) adds a scene where Pilate’s wife has a dream and intercedes for Jesus because he is a “righteous man” (Mt 27:18-19) and (b) adds a scene where Pilate washes his hands of the matters and the Jews say, “Let his blood be on us and our children” (Mt 27:25).

Luke: Adds a scene where Pilate sends Jesus to Herod Antipas for judgment. And he has Pilate declare that Jesus was innocent three times (Lk 23:4, 6-16, 22), whereas Matthew has Pilate declare Jesus innocent once (Mt 27:24).

John: Pilate declares Jesus innocent three times (Jn 18:38; 19:4, 6).

When the items listed above are taken into consideration, John Dominic Crossan describes the passion narrative as 80 percent “prophecy historicized” and 20 percent “history remembered.”⁸ Raymond Brown and James Dunn expresses greater confidence that much of the passion narratives rest on solid historical grounds—the detail may be unclear, but the general framework rests on firm historical memory.

⁸ Tatum, *In Quest of Jesus*, 221.

IV. Historical Difficulties: What day was the crucifixion?

“The passion narrative present different, sometimes contradictory, perspectives on specific issues related to the death of Jesus—the date, the trial, the death.”⁹

A. Jewish reckoning

- A “day” went from sunset to sunset (not 12 midnight)
- The “Day of Preparation” was on 14th Nisan
- The “Passover Day” was on 15th Nisan

B. Synoptics — Jesus was executed on *Passover Day* (Nisan 15)

- Jesus’ last meal was a Passover meal on Thursday evening (15th Nisan) (Mk 14:12-16)
- Jesus was crucified on Friday on Passover Day (15th Nisan)

C. John — Jesus was executed on the *Day of Preparation* (Nisan 14)

- Jesus’ last meal was on Thursday evening before Passover (14th Nisan)
- Jesus was crucified on the Day of Preparation Friday (14th Nisan) (Jn 18:28; 19:14, 31, 42)

D. Four ways of handling the conflicting data

- ***Adopt Synoptic dating.*** John’s dating was theologically motivated—Jesus dies when the Passover lamb is killed. The details of the Synoptics are more in keeping with Passover meals according to Jeremias.
- ***Adopt Johannine dating.*** Synoptics were theologically motivated. The sacramental meal of the church is linked to the Passover supper. The Passover day was a holy day and treated like a Sabbath. As such, some of the details of the Synoptics are unlikely—the legal proceedings, the crucifixion, the travel of Simon of Cyrene, the purchase of a shroud, and the burial of Jesus on Passover!
- ***Harmonize the dating.*** John uses the “official” calendar. In John, Jesus celebrated the Passover meal a day early. However, according to the “unofficial” calendar used at Qumran, Passover was a day earlier than the official calendar. Hence, according to the Qumran calendar, the Synoptics are correct also.
- ***Adopt neither dating.*** We know that Jesus was arrested, tried, and executed at Passover time. We cannot know more.

E. Historical Difficulties: The Trial

A. What was the “trigger event” that led to Jesus’ arrest and trial?

⁹ Tatum, *In Quest of Jesus*, 222.

1. Why was Jesus crucified? To be historical the historical Jesus must have been crucifiable. Jesus was not Mr. Rogers. Most scholars are convinced that Jesus' disruption of the Temple was the immediate antecedent cause for Jesus' arrest and execution.
2. Jewish view. From the perspective of the Jewish leaders, Jesus' demonstration in the Temple threatened the power brokers of the Temple system and threatened the peace. But more than that, Jesus' action was probably viewed as blasphemy against the God who's Temple it was. In the ancient world, there was no greater way to show disrespect for a god than to raid, pillage, and destroy temple of that god.
 - a. In Jewish tradition, Sennacherib is identified as a blasphemer because he threatened to destroy the Temple in 701 B.C.
 - b. Even more so, in Jewish tradition, Antiochus Epiphanes is recognized as the great blasphemer because he not only robbed the Temple, but he also desecrated the Alter by slaughtering a pig on it. In the same way, Jesus' disruption of the Temple was probably viewed as an Antiochus-like blasphemy and affront to the God and leaders of Israel.
3. Roman view. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the Romans executed Jesus. Crucifixion was a Roman form of execution inflicted on *slaves* and *rebels*. It is likely that the Romans were motivated to execute Jesus for two reasons.
 - a. First, Pilate would have been motivated to squelch troublemakers from stirring up mobs of people during Passover when tens of thousands of Jews flooded the city of Jerusalem. Jesus' temple demonstration would have provoked a rapid response by the Romans.
 - b. Second, it is plausible that Jewish authorities convinced Pilate that Jesus was making a political claim to power. This is born out by the inscription above the cross, which identified Jesus as "king of the Jews" (Mk 15:26)—clearly, Jesus was crucified on political grounds, claiming to be king in a world that only allowed Caesar to be king.

B. What kind of Jewish inquiry or trial took place?

1. **Formal trial in Mark and Matthew** (Mk 14:53-15:1; Mt 26:57-27:2)
 - Jesus is taken before the Sanhedrin at night;
 - Witnesses testify; Jesus is interrogated;
 - Are you the Messiah? Mark—"Yes". Matthew—"No".
 - Jesus is charged with blasphemy by the High Priest and condemned.
 - In the morning, the Sanhedrin meets again before turning Jesus over to Pilate.
2. **An inquiry in Luke** (Lk 22:54-23:1)
 - Jesus is taken to the High Priest's house at night;
 - There is no mention of Jesus meeting the High Priest;
 - There is no mention of the Sanhedrin meeting during the night;
 - In the morning, the Sanhedrin gathers and questions Jesus.
 - Are you the Messiah? Luke—ambiguous response.
3. **A conversation in John** (Jn 18:12-28)

- Jesus is taken to Annas, father-in-law of Caiaphas, and they have a conversation.
- Then Jesus is taken to Caiaphas the High Priest for a talk
- There is no gathering of the Sanhedrin that night or the next morning.

C. What were the charges brought before Pilate?

1. No specific charges brought to Pilate (Matt 27:1-2, 11-14; Mk 15:1-5). There were “many accusations” presented to Pilate, but no specific charges are mentioned. The charge was blasphemy before the High Priest, but this is not mentioned to Pilate.

2. Political charges brought to Pilate (Lk 23:1-5). “We found this man perverting our nation, and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar and saying that he himself is Christ a king.”

3. Religious charges brought to Pilate (Jn 18:29-30 [criminal]; 19:6-7 [Son of God]). The Jews state, “We have a law, and by that law he ought to die because he has made himself the Son of God.”

D. How many trials were there?

1. Jesus had two trials—a Jewish trial and a Roman trial. Results from the harmonization of the four Gospels.

2. Jesus had one trial—a Roman trial. Results from the dismissal of Mark’s account as non-historical. Gives weight to Luke’s account, which places emphasis on the political charge.

3 Jesus had no trials. Jesus was arrested following his action in the Temple. Jesus’ disciples fled at that point and would not have known what happened to Jesus after he was arrested. Crossan sees no need to postulate a trial. Trial accounts represent prophecy historicized, not history remembered

V. Crucifixion

A. Examples of Roman crucifixion.

1. In 71 BCE, the Romans crucified of 6,000 followers of Spartacus as part of a victory celebration along the Appian Way in 71 BCE (see *Bella Civilia* 1.120).
2. In 6 CE, the Syrian governor, **Varus**, needed three legions as well as auxiliary troops to put down revolts in Jewish Palestine, including three major messianic uprising after the death of Herod the Great and around the time of Jesus’ birth. According to Josephus, when Varus arrived in Jerusalem, he crucified two thousand rebels.
3. In 66 CE, at the start of the first Roman-Jewish War, the Roman governor **Florus** had about 3,600 Jewish children, women, and men scourged and crucified in a single day.

4. In 70 CE, the Roman general, **Titus**, had his army circled and lay siege to Jerusalem. After many months siege (how many months?), when famine had broken out, many of the Jerusalemites began to flee the city during the cover of night. Most were caught so that each day the Romans caught, tortured, and crucified about 500 Jews per day (Josephus, *Jewish War* 5.11 & 451).
5. Why, with so many thousands crucified in the first century around Jerusalem, has only one skeleton been found? Crossan argues that it was because crucified people were not buried (see Hengel). However, there is contrary evidence to Crossan.
 - a) Jewish law required that the body of an executed criminal should be taken down before nightfall (Deut 21:22-23); Josephus confirms this was current practice (War 4.317).
 - b) The tradition of Jesus' burial is one of the oldest and best-attested pieces of tradition (1 Cor 15:1ff).
 - c) The skeletal remains of *Yehochanan* (see above) was placed in a tomb.
 - d) Philo states that the bodies of crucified people were allowed to be taken down on the eve of a holiday (*Flacc.* 83).

B. Jesus' death by crucifixion is historically certain.

- a. Jesus' death by crucifixion is historically certain, however, those detailed narratives in our present gospels are much more problematic. As we have seen, the details describing the event surrounding Jesus' crucifixion are problematic.
- b. See Hengel's summary describing crucifixion (Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion*, 86-88).
- c. *Yehochanan*, the crucified man. In June 1968 the only skeleton of a crucified person was uncovered in Jerusalem in a tomb that dates from the first century. It was found among the bones of 35 other individuals. The crucified person was a male was in his twenties. His name was *Yehochanan*. His arms had not been nailed, but tied, to the bar of the cross, probably with his arms to the elbows hung over and behind it. His legs had been placed on either side of the upright beam, with nails holding his heel bones to the wood on either side. There was no evidence that the legs were broken, which was sometimes done in crucifixions, causing a speedier death by asphyxiation because the chest would cave in.

VI. How Did Jesus View His Death?

A. How did Jesus understand his death?

- The focus is on his words at the last supper
- "This is my body ... This is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many" (Mk 14:22-25)

B. How did Jesus view forgiveness of sins?

- **Matt 6:14-15:** for if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your father forgive your trespasses.”
- **Luke 6:37:** “Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven.”
- **Mark 2:3-12:** Jesus said to the Capernaum paralytic, “My son, your sins are forgiven.”
- In these statements, Jesus did not correlate forgiveness and his crucifixion. Jesus never said, “Believe that my crucifixion is a sin sacrifice for you.”

C. Three ways this has been understood, and they do not exclude or contradict:

- Jesus saw his death as establishing a *new covenant*—recalls Moses’ covenant making (Exod 24:1-8).
- Jesus saw his death as a *substitutionary atonement*—reflects Suffering Servant (Isa 52:13—53:12). He would suffer as part of God’s will, as others, the faithful and righteous, had before him. Perhaps he thought his death would mark the final end to Israel’s suffering.
- Jesus saw his death as *martyrdom*—recalls prophets who suffered for faithfulness (Lk 13:32-33).