

# An Unknown Roman Soldier Is Identified

In this article the unknown Roman soldier who stabbed Jesus Christ as He hung on the cross is positively identified.

This individual Roman soldier's brutality played a most significant role in human history.

He was responsible for the death of Jesus Christ.

## The mystery unravelled

Prepare yourself for a shocking revelation.

You may already know some of this account of Jesus Christ's final hours on earth before His death on the cross.

Jesus Christ had been arrested and tried by an unlawful "kangaroo" court.

After, Pilate reluctantly submitted to the wishes of the angry mob outside his quarters and delivered Jesus Christ to be crucified.

Jesus Christ, bearing His cross, went out to a place called Golgotha, where the Roman soldiers crucified Him with other criminals on either side and Jesus Christ in the middle.

**John 19:23-24** [New King James] *"Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took His garments and made four parts, to each soldier a part, and also the tunic. Now the tunic was without seam, woven from the top in one piece. They said therefore among themselves, 'Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be,' that the Scripture might be fulfilled which says: 'They divided My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots.' Therefore the soldiers did these things."*

This fulfilled the prophecy in **Psalms 22:18**.

**John 19:28-37** [New King James] *"After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, 'I thirst!' Now a vessel full of sour wine was sitting there; and they filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on hyssop, and put it to His mouth. So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, 'It is finished!' And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit. Therefore, because it was the Preparation Day, that the bodies should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who was crucified with Him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs. But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out. And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you may believe. For these things were done that the Scripture should be fulfilled, 'Not one of His bones shall be broken.' And again another Scripture says, 'They shall look on Him whom they pierced.'"*

This is a very matter-of-fact account of the death of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

But let us consider the Roman soldier who pierced the side of the God-man hanging grotesquely upon the cross.

This soldier was, obviously, very much like the others who had crucified Jesus Christ, dashing in his Roman uniform and armour, cocky, brash, daring, perhaps proud of his exploits, maybe laughing with the others.

What significance was there to his action?

Was not Jesus Christ already dead?

Why did the soldiers not break Jesus Christ's legs?

Did, as many suppose, Jesus Christ die of a "*broken heart*"?

Let us get the answers to these questions.

It is commonly taught that Jesus Christ did die of a broken heart, this idea was introduced by Dr. Stroud about the year 1847 in his book '*On the Physiological Cause of the Death of Christ.*'

Dr. Stroud claimed that Jesus Christ died of "*laceration or rupture of the heart.*"

This idea has since been perpetuated by some Protestants.

But is this idea true?

Did Jesus Christ shed His blood only **after** He died?

Quotation: '*International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*' in an article '*Blood and Water*':  
"*It is well attested that usually the suffering on the cross was very prolonged. It often lasted two or three days, when death would supervene from exhaustion. There were no physical reasons why Christ should not have lived very much longer on the cross than He did.*"

The question is, why did Christ die so soon?

Why was Christ not able to suffer longer than He did?

If Jesus Christ died of a broken heart, because He was weak and was suffering the penalty of sin, then He died for His own sins!

But Jesus Christ was strong, for He obeyed God's laws, the physical laws as well as the spiritual laws.

**1 Corinthians 5:7** [New King James] "*Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.*"

Unless Jesus Christ was sacrificed, actually shed His own blood, we have **no** Saviour.

Unless the original Passover Lamb had been sacrificed or slain, had its blood shed, the Israelites in Egypt could never have been delivered out of Egypt, symbolic of out of the penalty of sin, [**Romans 6:23**].

## **Jesus Christ did bleed to death**

**Hebrews 9:22** [New King James] "*And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission.*"

It does **not** say "*without a broken heart there is no remission of sins.*"

Jesus Christ was brought as a lamb to the slaughter, [**Acts 8:32**].

When a lamb is slaughtered, its blood is shed. It does **not** die of itself, neither did Jesus Christ.

**Leviticus 17:11** [New King James] *“For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul.”*

Life is in the blood, therefore Jesus Christ poured out His life.

This brings us back to the question: Why didn't the soldiers break the legs of Jesus Christ?

Because He was already dead!

If Jesus Christ died any way other than the shedding of blood, He could **not** be our Saviour.

Also, why did the soldier decide, almost as an afterthought, to pierce the side of an already deceased victim?

**He didn't**, the Roman soldier stabbed Jesus Christ **before** He died.

**The piercing with the spear was actually the cause of Jesus Christ's death, He bled to death.**

A strategic verse is missing from many translations of the account of the crucifixion.

Notice carefully **Matthew 27:50** from the Fenton translation:

*“But another taking a spear pierced His side, when blood and water came out. Jesus, however, having again called out with a loud voice, resigned His spirit.”*

Also the Moffat translation **Matthew 27:45-51**:

*“Now from twelve o'clock to three o'clock darkness covered all the land, and about three o'clock Jesus gave a loud cry, ‘Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani’ [that is, My God, My God, why forsake me?] On hearing this, some of the bystanders said, ‘He is calling for Elijah.’ One of them ran off at once and took a sponge, which he soaked in vinegar and put on the end of a stick, to give him a drink. But the others said, ‘stop, let us see if Elijah does come to save him!’ Seizing a lance, another pricked his side, and out came water and blood. Jesus uttered a loud scream, and gave up His spirit...”*

**The Greek word translated “pricked” is “nussō” meaning to inflict a deadly wound.**

This gaping wound in Jesus Christ's side was large enough for a man to literally thrust his hand into, [**John 20:27**], is it any wonder that Jesus Christ *“uttered a loud scream”*?

**The sharp weapon wielded by the Roman soldier ripped open and lacerated the bowels of Jesus Christ and travelled upwards to rip open His heart and lungs.**

This Roman soldier was responsible for the ignominious death of his only hope for avoiding that penalty of death himself.

## **Hope for this soldier**

Imagine now, at the time of this young soldier's resurrection, [**Revelation 1:7**], the grief, sorrow and shame he will feel at what he did. He could succumb to the burden of guilt and feel that all is lost.

But there is good news, even for this soldier.

**Revelation 20** tells us about a future time when, as Jesus Christ mentioned in **John 5:28-29**, all who are in their graves will hear His voice and shall come forth.

That is a time that should excite every human being, for it will be the time of righteous judgement and mercy for all human beings.

It is a time that will, without doubt, excite the unknown Roman soldier, who will recognise Jesus Christ and remember his part in His cruel death.

**Revelation 20:12-13** [New King James] *“And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works.”*

The unknown soldier will recognise those things written in the books, [Greek “*biblios*”] referring to the Old and New Testaments of the Christian Bible.

He will lament when he reads **1 John 3:4**; **Romans 6:23** and **Romans 3:23**.

**But this soldier’s spirits will begin to soar as he reads that even he, the actual murderer at Golgotha, can be justified by the blood of that hapless, defenceless victim who hung on the cross, [Romans 5:9].**

**He will tearfully and shamefully reflect upon the warm blood of the Saviour that spurted over his arms as he thrust his spear into His side.**

**He will cry tears of gratitude and deep love for the God who is big enough to be willing to die for His own creation, [John 1:1-3, 14], in order that the human creation might be able to live forever.**

**He will read, study and learn what he must do.**

**Acts 2:36-38** [New King James] *“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.’ Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Men and brethren, what shall we do?’ Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’”*

It will **not** be difficult for this resurrected Roman soldier to heed the admonition.

His recollections will be a nightmare, vivid, haunting, crushing, until he recognises fully the enormity of his deed, murdering the Christ and accepts the awesome, unmerited sacrifice of the same Jesus Christ.

Then he can be at peace!

## **The scene at the cross**

The only difference between this unknown Roman soldier and the others who took part in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ is that this soldier can be identified now. He doesn’t have to wait for a resurrection as do the others.

Let us take a look at the group gathered at the cross, especially focusing on the soldiers.

They all look the same, squatting at the foot of the cross, dividing the garments of the naked Jesus Christ on the cross, [**Matthew 27:35-36**].

**Now zero in on the soldier who wielded the spear. We are able to pick him out quite easily, for he is the one with the blood on his breastplate and on his bare arms.**

**This soldier has his back to us, but after piercing the body of Jesus Christ he turns towards us.**

**We suddenly see the spear-bearing killer of Jesus Christ, full face.**

**We gasp sharply, hard pressed to look at the face peering back at us, for it is very familiar.**

**The unknown soldier has been identified as us, personally, in terror we see the blood of Jesus Christ dripping from our own outstretched hands.**

Just as the apostle Peter said we all had our hands on the spear that murdered our only Saviour, [Acts 4:8-12].

**This realisation should pale into insignificance everything else in our lives.**

**The recognition of our personal responsibility for the very Creator of all humanity being murdered.**

## **Why Jesus Christ had to die**

**Romans 6:23** [New King James] *“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

**Sin demands the death penalty and all humans sin.**

**Romans 3:23** [New King James] *“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,”*

Because all humans have sinned [1 John 3:4] the Holy God cannot glorify, that is give eternal life, to any who are **not** in harmony with His way of life that is based on love.

**The only solution to this is for the One who gave life to all humanity, Jesus Christ the Word, [John 1:1-4, 14] should die for all humanity to be freed from that penalty of death.**

**John 3:16-21** [New King James] *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. ‘He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.’”*

God did this because of the great love he has for all humanity who have ever existed.

**Hebrews 2:9-10** [New King James] *“But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honour, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone. For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.”*

**This is a vivid expression of the love that the Triune God has for all humanity.**

**Philippians 2:5-8** [New King James] *“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.”*

**God became human so that He could shed His life blood on the cross as a substitute for our deserved death.**

## **How must we all respond to this sacrifice of Jesus Christ?**

The same as those who were convicted by the apostle Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost.

**Acts 2:36-38** [New King James] *“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.’ Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Men and brethren, what shall we do?’ Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.’”*

Only if we respond in this way will this sacrifice that Jesus Christ made for each one of us personally **not** be in vain.

**The choice is ours to make, accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour or die eternally.**

**Romans 12:1-2** [NIV] *“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is, his good, pleasing and perfect will.”*

**This is the only way we can show our gratitude to God for what He has done for us individually through Jesus Christ.**