



"The high-minded man must care more for the truth than for what people think."
—Aristotle

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Was Jesus Christ's Body Broken? (Part One)

How often have we heard the phrase "Christ's broken body"? Many have heard it throughout their lives and have used it countless times. It rolls off the tongue easily and with hardly a second thought. But is it accurate? Is it faithful to Scripture? Is it a valid concept? What effect does it have on our observance of the [Passover](#)?

While we cannot find the exact phrase in the Bible, Paul's comments in [I Corinthians 11:23-24](#) are its source:

For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord [Jesus](#) on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; *this is My body [which is broken for you](#)* ; do this in remembrance of Me." (Emphasis ours throughout)

The margin of the New King James Version has a footnote for the word "broken" indicating that the oldest—and some aver, the best—Greek texts do

not include it. "Broken" is, in fact, not found in most other translations, which instead render this verse as Jesus saying something to the effect of, "This is My body, which is for you."

"Broken" (referring to Christ's body) is also missing in the Synoptic Gospels' accounts of this aspect of the Passover service:

» And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is My body." ([Matthew 26:26](#))

» And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them and said, "Take, eat; this is My body." ([Mark 14:22](#))

» And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me." ([Luke 22:19](#))

Only Luke's account deviates by including the word "given." This wording fits with Jesus saying in [John 6:51](#): ". . . the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I *shall give* for the life of [the world](#)." He does not mention His body being broken, only that the bread represents His body.

Even so, some may maintain that their preferred Greek text contains the word "broken," making it valid. However, this introduces a grammatical difficulty. The verb tense of the presumed "broken" (*klao* or *klazo*) in this verse is present passive, indicating that Christ's body was being broken right then—which it obviously was not.

Similarly, others dismiss the distinction since Jesus' skin was broken when He was scourged and crucified. This, though, is likewise a poor and porous defense, for *klao/klazo* is only ever used in Scripture for the breaking—dividing into pieces—of bread at a meal. The word itself must be tortured to indicate breaking only an outer layer of the crust or the skin.

On a practical level, Jesus had to break the physical bread to share it among the Twelve. In His statement, He was speaking of sharing His life, as we will

see. But His body was *not* broken, an important distinction. The literal bread was broken so they could all eat of it, but if Christ's body were broken, it would introduce major problems in the fulfillment of several scriptures.

The apostle John's account of [the crucifixion](#) of our Savior includes significant details that the other gospels omit. Notice his description and summary of the end of the crucifixion:

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. . . . 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." ([John 19:28-34](#), 36-37)

John filled his gospel with signs and proofs that Jesus was the Messiah, often drawing attention to His fulfillment of various scriptures. For example, in verse 28, John records Jesus saying, "I thirst!" in reference to [Psalm 22:15](#), a well-known Messianic psalm. He prefaces this quotation with "that the Scripture might be fulfilled." Previous chapters contain numerous examples of this.

Notice, however, verse 36, which adds a crucial detail: "For these things were done that the Scripture should be fulfilled, 'Not one of His bones shall be broken.'" Part of the cruelty of crucifixion was the position of the arms in relation to the rest of the body. Because the victim was nailed up with his arms above his head, his upper ribcage was compressed, making it hard for

him to breathe. Anyone who has hung from a branch or a bar knows that his lungs became constricted. The longer a person hangs without pulling up—especially if his hands are close together—the more he feels as if he will run out of air.

In a crucifixion, the victim was severely abused before being nailed up, so he, already weakened, would have difficulty pulling himself up to breathe. But not wanting the misery to end too soon, the executioners would give him some painful help by nailing his feet to the stake too. In this way, if he could suffer the agony of putting all his weight on his impaled feet, he could push himself up with his legs and breathe easier for as long as he could endure that position.

However, if the execution needed to end more quickly, the executioners would break the victim's legs so he could not push himself up. Death followed shortly thereafter. This leg-breaking is what almost happened with Jesus. The Jews, hypocritically not wanting their murder of the Son of [God](#) to interfere with their keeping of the holy day, requested that the Romans break the legs of those being crucified. When they came to Jesus, however, He was already dead. They pierced Him instead, and a Messianic prophecy was fulfilled. And in leaving Christ's legs unbroken, another scripture, [Psalm 34:20](#), was fulfilled.

We will consider this scripture and its implications next time.

- David C. Grabbe

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by Staff

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