Look through any collection of classical art and study the depictions of Jesus’ body. You will find portrayals of Jesus as skinny or heavily muscled. An adult Jesus may have a younger man’s body or a “dad body.” Artists show him clothed, semi-clothed or naked. They often depict his wounded body at the crucifixion -- sometimes with blood.

But in the many different paintings of Jesus’ body from artists -- in a multitude of countries and across a millennia of art-making -- he nearly always has perfect skin. Sure, he may have a wound where the soldier’s spear poked him in the side or cuts on his back where he was flogged. But, elsewhere on his body, his skin is without blemish.

This is not just misleading, but downright inaccurate. The body of Jesus of Nazareth -- who had a rural upbringing and spent years of his adulthood walking the countryside -- would have been covered in scratches. In fact, he probably spent much of his life healing from injuries to his skin. And not him alone, but all of his fellow Galileans.

Why? Because most of the native flora in northern Israel, within 20-30 miles of Nazareth, is out to get you.

I know this from personal experience. Earlier this summer, I spent three weeks walking the hills on the west side of the Jezreel Valley. At 8 hours a day, I logged over 300 miles of walking (usually at temperatures where they tell you to get out of the sun). On the other side of the valley was Nazareth, less than 15 miles away.

What I discovered was this: Eighty percent of the flora has thorns, thistles, spikes or barbs. It grows prolifically. It is tall. It is overgrown. The bushes grow into the trails and the thistles invade the fields.

And these plants are not small. The average size for one thistle species was chest-height. But, that was average; it often grew well above my head. And, I am six feet tall. Once it dried out for the summer (in mid-May), the thorns became hard and inflexible.

I often encountered this thistle in fields, among the wheat. We forget how much weed killer we spray on fields in modern farming. That did not happen in Jesus’ time. So, the thistles would grow with the weeds. A farmer might be able to pull out some of them but, often, had to let the weeds grow with the crop and then separate them at harvest (See Matthew 13). Whenever he worked in his fields, he encountered these vicious thistles.

Often, the bushes would grow tall and wide, pushing with their thorns into and over trails. To move down such a trail, you need to make yourself small and inch slowly between the thorny bushes. You could get 10 feet down such a tight patch and, just when you thought you were free, you find a vine with sharp thorns growing across the trail. So, you stand there with thorns poking through your skin while you disentangle the vine.

This was my experience with Israel’s plant life; and I wore long trousers, ankle-high leather work boots and a long-sleeved shirt. Imagine what it would have been like for Jesus, who would have worn open-toe sandals and a robe. And, if he was working outside, he would have “girded his loins” by tying the robe around his groin and leaving his legs bare. That provides no protection from scratches.

Today, we have paved roads, streets and sidewalks; we can get on them and escape the thorns and thistles. But, once Jesus left the protection of a town, he would have walked down dirt trails from village to village. Trails that would not have been maintained except by travelers. Roman-built roads were few and far between, and not near a backwater like Galilee at all.

So, even if Jesus could have used Jergens Body Lotion, it would not have given him perfect skin. The natural world within which he lived his daily life was just too likely to scratch him every time he went out.