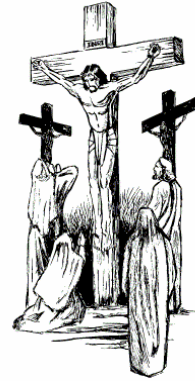




The Passion of the Christ

“Christ Died ...”



1. Did Jesus Really Die?

- a. It is generally accepted that Jesus Christ really died. However, there are some who have denied his death on the cross.
- b. Muslims deny that Jesus was crucified. The Qur'an says that it only appeared that Jesus was crucified (Surah 4:157). It is typically held that it was not really Jesus on the cross.
- c. Others have suggested that Jesus somehow survived the cross. Rather than dying, he “swooned” (fainted) either due to exhaustion or drugs. Thus Jesus was not raised from the dead, he was merely resuscitated. However, the various “swoon theories” have no real basis.
- d. Denials of Jesus' death do not accord with the evidence. Jesus really died.

2. Jesus Really Died

- a. His physical deterioration began in Gethsemane on the night before his crucifixion. “*And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground*” (Luke 22:44). Jesus experienced a medical condition called hematidrosis, which is associated with a high degree of psychological stress. His severe anxiety caused the tiny capillaries in his sweat glands to rupture, mixing blood with sweat. As a result, Jesus' skin became extremely fragile.
- b. After Jesus was sentenced to death, “[*Pilate*] had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified” (Mark 15:15). As customary before a crucifixion, Jesus was beaten severely with a whip (known as a flagrum) made of leather thongs with sharp, jagged pieces of bone and lead woven into them. Typically, the shoulders, back and legs were struck repeatedly, eventually tearing through the flesh into the subcutaneous tissues, eventually resulting in arterial bleeding from vessels in the underlying muscle.
- c. “*The soldiers...twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on [Jesus' head]...Again and again they struck him on the head with a staff and spit on him*” (Mark 15:16-19).
- d. “*Carrying his own cross, [Jesus] went out to the place of the Skull*” (John 19:17). It was customary for the criminal to carry his own cross (on his shoulders) to the place of his execution. Here, ‘cross’ probably refers to the cross-member, the horizontal bar, which may have weighed about 110 pounds. Jesus was too weak to carry the cross the entire distance, so “they forced [*Simon*] to carry the cross” (Matthew 27:32).
- e. “*Here they crucified him*” (John 19:18). The Roman soldiers nailed him to the cross by driving large iron spikes through Jesus' wrists and feet. The spikes were probably 5 to 7 inches long and 3/8 inch thick (based on archaeological findings). In the ensuing 6 hours, Jesus experienced cycles of cramps, intermediate asphyxiation, and excruciating pain as his lacerated back moved up and down against the rough timber.
- f. In crucifixion, the method of death was asphyxiation – in particular, the build-up of carbon dioxide in the lungs. After a while on the cross, the arms fatigue and the muscles cramp, hindering the person from pushing himself up. Hanging by the arms, the pectoral muscles are paralyzed and the intercostal muscles are unable to act. The person can inhale, but he cannot exhale. To hasten death, the authorities would break the legs below

the knees with a club (to prevent the victim from pushing up). The soldiers broke the legs of the others being crucified, “*but when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs*” (John 19:33).

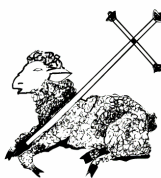
- g. “*Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus’ side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water*” (John 19:34). They made sure Jesus was dead. The spear entered through the rib cage, piercing the pericardium (the fluid-containing sac around the heart) and penetrating the heart.



- h. In the article “On the Physical Death of Jesus Christ” the *Journal of the American Medical Society* concluded: “Clearly, the weight of historical and medical evidence indicates that Jesus was dead before the wound to His side was inflicted and supports the traditional view that the spear, thrust between His right ribs, probably perforated not only his right lung but also the pericardium and heart and thereby ensured his death. Accordingly, interpretations based on the assumption that Jesus did not die on the cross appear to be at odds with modern medical knowledge.” (William D. Edwards, M.D., et al., *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 255:11, March 21, 1986, p. 1463).

3. Why Did Jesus Die?

- a. The Roman authority repeatedly said, “*I find no basis for a charge against him*” (John 18:38; cf. 19:4, 6; Luke 23:14). “*He has done nothing to deserve death*” (Luke 23:15; cf. 23:22). “*He committed no sin*” (1 Peter 2:22 cf. 1 John 3:5; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Heb 4:15). Though innocent, Jesus was sentenced to the horrible punishment of the cross.
- b. Jesus predicted his death (and resurrection) on at least three separate occasions up to a year before his crucifixion. On his final trip to Jerusalem, Jesus said, “*they will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, who will mock him, spit on him, flog him, and kill him*” (Mark 10:33-34). Jesus said that he “*did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many*” (Mark 10:45).
- c. About 700 years before Jesus’ crucifixion, the prophet Isaiah wrote about a suffering servant (Isaiah 52:13-53:12). Isaiah’s prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus in amazing detail.



- “*He was pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities*” (53:5a).
 - “*The punishment that brought us peace was upon Him, and by His wounds are we healed*” (53:5b).
 - “*The Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all*” (53:6).
 - “*He bore the sin of many*” (52:12b).
- d. Jesus Christ died for our sins, and made possible the “great exchange” – our sin for his righteousness. “*God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might be the righteousness of God*” (2 Corinthians 5:21). It is only on the basis of Christ’s righteousness that we can be reconciled to God and have eternal life.

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