

Medical Aspects of the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ

John 3:16: 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.

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Hebrews 12:2 ? *"Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."*

In the last few hours of Jesus' life what did He endure, and what shame did He suffer?

EXCRUCIATE: to cause great agony, torment

Latin : ex : out of, from cruciate : cross

"from the cross"

The tone of this presentation can best be summarized in the word "*excruciate*", (the root of the word "*excruciating*") which refers to something which causes great agony or torment. The Latin roots of the word are : "*ex*", meaning from or out of, and "*cruciate*", meaning cross. The word "*excruciate*" comes from the Latin for "*from, or out of, the cross*" (Webster's).

GENERAL OVERVIEW

Jesus spent the last hours before the crucifixion at several places in Jerusalem. He started the evening in the Upper Room, in southwest Jerusalem. At the Last Supper, He told the disciples that His body and His blood were to be given for them (Matthew 26: 26-29). He went outside of the city to the Garden of Gethsemane. He was then arrested and brought back to the palace of the High Priest. where He was questioned by Annas, a former High Priest, and Caiaphas, Annas' son in law . Afterwards, He was tried by the Sanhedrin, and found to be guilty of blasphemy by proclaiming Himself the Son of God. He was sentenced to the death penalty. Since only the Romans were able to execute criminals, He was sent to

Pontius Pilate at the Antonia Fortress. Pilate, not finding anything wrong, sent Him to King Herod , who returned Him back to Pilate. Pilate, submitting to the pressure of the crowd, then ordered that Jesus be flogged and crucified. He was finally led out of the city walls to be crucified at Calvary.

THE HEALTH OF JESUS AND DEMANDS OF THE ORDEAL

It is reasonable to assume that Jesus was in good health prior to the ordeal that He faced in the hours before His death. Having been a carpenter and traveling throughout the land during His ministry would have required that He would be in good physical condition. Before the crucifixion, however, He was forced to walk 2.5 miles over a sleepless night, during which He suffered great anguish through His six trials, was mocked, ridiculed and severely beaten, and was abandoned by His friends and Father. (Edwards)

THE UPPER ROOM OR CENACULUM

The ordeal began in an upper room of a house at what we now call the Last Supper, where Jesus, in giving the first communion, predicted that His body and blood would be given (Matthew 26:17-29). Today in Jerusalem, one can visit the Cenacle or Cenaculum (Latin for dining hall), a room which is built over what is believed to be the site of the Upper Room, (Kollek) which was located on the southwestern aspect of the old city.

GETHSEMANE : oil press

Luke 22:44 *And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood* falling to the ground.

"the Spirit of Godcrushed"

From the upper room, Jesus went outside of the city walls where he spent time in prayer at the Garden of Gethsemane. The garden has many ancient olive trees today, some of which may have grown from the roots of the trees that were present in Jesus' time. (All trees in and around Jerusalem were cut down when the Romans conquered the city in 70 A.D. Olive trees can regenerate from their roots and live for thousands of years.) The name "*Gethsemane*", comes from the Hebrew Gat Shmanim, meaning "*oil press*" (Kollek). Since "*oil*" is used in the Bible to symbolize the Holy Spirit, it may be said that the garden is where "*the Spirit of God was*

crushed" (Missler). It was here that Jesus agonized in prayer over what was to occur. It is significant that this is the only place in the KJV where the word "agony" is mentioned (Strong's concordance). The Greek word for agony means to be "engaged in combat" (Pink) Jesus agonizes over what He is to go through, feeling that He is at the point of death.(Mark14:34) Yet He prays, "Not my will, but thine be done."

Of medical significance is that Luke mentions Him as having sweat like blood. The medical term for this, "*hemohidrosis*" or "*hematidrosis*" has been seen in patients who have experienced, extreme stress or shock to their systems. (Edwards) The capillaries around the sweat pores become fragile and leak blood into the sweat. A case history is recorded in which a young girl who had a fear of air raids in WW1 developed the condition after a gas explosion occurred in the house next door (Scott). Another report mentions a nun who, as she was threatened with death by the swords of the enemy soldiers, " *was so terrified that she bled from every part of her body and died of hemorrhage in the sight of her assailants*" (Grafenberg). As a memorial to Jesus' ordeal, a church which now stands in Gethsemane is known as the Church of the Agony ? also called the Church of the Nations because many nations donated money to its construction (Kollek).

ABANDONED BY MAN

Matthew 26:56: "*Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.*"

Psalm 22:11: "*Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help.*"

While in Gethsemane, Jesus is betrayed by Judas and arrested by the Jews. His disciples all desert Him, even at the expense of running away naked (Mark 14:51-52). He is bound (John 18:12) then brought back to the city to the court of the High Priest, which is located near the Upper room.

ILLEGAL ASPECTS OF THE TRIAL OF JESUS

Following are some of the illegal aspects of the trial of Jesus:

- Trials could occur only in the regular meeting places of the Sanhedrin (not in the palace of the High Priest)

- Trials could not occur on the eve of the Sabbath or Feast Days or at night
- A sentence of 'guilty' might only be pronounced on the day following the trial

THE ISSUE OF WITNESSES

Deuteronomy 19:15: *"One witness is not enough to convict a man accused of any crime or offense he may have committed. A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses."*

Deuteronomy 17:6: *"On the testimony of two or three witnesses a man shall be put to death, but no one shall be put to death on the testimony of only one witness."*

Mark 14:56: *"Many testified falsely against him, but their statements did not agree."*

While in the court of the High Priest, He was questioned by Annas (John 18:13) and struck by a soldier (John 18: 22). He was then brought to Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin. who sought to put Jesus to death by the false testimony of many witnesses. The witnesses brought against Him did not agree. By the law, no one could be put to death without the agreement of two or three witnesses. Although the witnesses did not agree, He was found guilty of blasphemy when He told them of His identity as the Son of God. He was sentenced to death. Jesus suffered ridicule from the palace guards, who spat on Him, beat Him and slapped Him on the face (Mark 14:65.) During the trial, Peter denies Him three times. The proceedings of Jesus' trial violated many of the laws of His society. Among some of the other broken laws were (Bucklin):

1. Any arrest could not be made at night.
2. The time and date of the trial were illegal because it took place at night and on the eve of the Sabbath. This time precluded any chance for the required adjournment to the next day in the event of a conviction.
3. The Sanhedrin was without authority to instigate charges. It was only supposed to investigate charges brought before it. In Jesus' trial, the court itself formulated the charges.
4. The charges against Jesus were changed during the trial. He was

initially charged with blasphemy based upon His statement that He would be able to destroy and rebuild the Temple of God within three days, as well as His claim to be the Son of God. When He was brought before Pilate, the charge was that Jesus was a King and did not advocate paying taxes to the Romans.

5. As stated above, the requirement of two witnesses in agreement to merit the death penalty was not met.

6. The court did not meet in the regular meeting place of the Sanhedrin, as required by Jewish law.

7. Christ was not permitted a defense. Under Jewish law, an exhaustive search into the facts presented by the witnesses should have occurred.

8. The Sanhedrin pronounced the death sentence. Under law, the Sanhedrin were not allowed to convict and put the death sentence into effect. (John 18:31)

Today, one can visit the palace of the High Priest. where one can stand in the midst of the ruins of the courtyard. A model of the structure in Jesus' time is available for viewing.

PILATE'S VERDICT

Mark 15:15 ? *"Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified."*

The Sanhedrin met early the next morning and sentenced Him to death. (Matthew 27:1) Because the Jews were not, and the Romans were, able to carry out an execution, Jesus was brought before Pilate. The charge was now changed to an allegation that Jesus claimed to be King and forbade the nation to pay taxes to Caesar. (Luke 23:5) In spite of all the charges, Pilate finds nothing wrong. He sends Jesus to Herod. Jesus is speechless before Herod, except to affirm that He is King of the Jews. Herod sends Him back to Pilate. Pilate is unable to convince the crowds of Jesus' innocence and orders Jesus to be put to death. Some sources state that it was Roman law that a criminal that was to be crucified had to be flogged first (McDowell). Others believe that Jesus was flogged first by Pilate in the hope of getting Him off with a lighter punishment (Davis). In spite of his efforts, the Jews allow Barabbas to be released and demand that Jesus be crucified, even crying that *,"His blood be on us and on our children!"* (Matthew 27:25) Pilate hands Jesus over

to be flogged and crucified.

It is at this point that Jesus suffers a severe physical beating. (Edwards) During a flogging, a victim was tied to a post, leaving his back entirely exposed. The Romans used a whip, called a flagrum or flagellum which consisted of small pieces of bone and metal attached to a number of leather strands. The number of strikes is not recorded in the gospels. The number of blows in Jewish law was set in Deuteronomy 25:3 at forty, but later reduced to 39 to prevent excessive blows by a counting error (Holmans). The victim often died from the beating. (39 hits were believed to bring the criminal to "*one from death*".) Roman law did not put any limits on the number of blows given. (McDowell) During the flogging, the skin was stripped from the back, exposing a bloody mass of muscle and bone ("*hamburger*": Metherall). Extreme blood loss occurred from this beating, weakening the victim. perhaps to the point of being unconscious.

ROMAN SOLDIERS MOCK AND BEAT JESUS

Matthew 27:28-30 (The soldiers) stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand and knelt in front of him and mocked him. "*Hail, king of the Jews!*" they said. They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. Jesus was then beaten by the Roman soldiers. In mockery, they dressed Him in what was probably the cloak of a Roman officer, which was colored dark purple or scarlet. (Amplified Bible) He also wore the crown of thorns. Unlike the traditional crown which is depicted by an open ring, the actual crown of thorns may have covered the entire scalp (Lumpkin). The thorns may have been 1 to 2 inches long. The gospels state that the Roman soldiers continued to beat Jesus on the head. The blows would drive the thorns into the scalp (one of the most vascular areas of the body) and forehead, causing severe bleeding.

THE CROWN OF THORNS AND THE ROBE

Genesis 3:17-18: "*Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field.*"

Isaiah 1:18 "*Come now, let us reason together,*" says the LORD. "*Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.*"

The significance of the scarlet robe and crown of thorns is to emphasize Jesus' taking the sins of the world upon His body. The Bible describes sin by the color of scarlet (Isaiah 1:18) and that thorns first appeared after the fall, as a sign of the curse. Thus, the articles that He wore are symbols to show that Jesus took on the sins (and the curse) of the world upon Himself. It is not clear that He wore the crown of thorns on the cross. Matthew describes that the Romans removed His clothes after the beating, and that they put His own clothes back on Him. (Matthew 27:31)

THE SEVERITY OF THE BEATING

Isaiah 50:6:

"I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting."

Isaiah 52:14: *"..... Just as there were many who were appalled at him ? his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness?"*

The severity of the beating is not detailed in the gospels. However, in the book of Isaiah, it suggests that the Romans pulled out His beard (Isaiah 50:8). It also mentions that Jesus was beaten so severely that His form did not look like that of "a son of a man" i.e. that of a human being. The literal translation of the verse reads, "So marred from the form of man was His aspect, that His appearance was not as that of a son of a man." People were appalled to look at Him (Isaiah 52:13). His disfigurement may explain why He was not easily recognized in His post resurrection appearances (Missler). Today, one can visit a site known as the Lithostrotos, traditionally believed to be the floor of the Antonio Fortress (although recent excavations may cast doubt on this theory (Gonen)). The floor is marked for games once played by the Roman soldiers.

From the beating, Jesus walked on a path, now known as the Via Dolorosa or the "way of suffering", to be crucified at Golgotha. The total distance has been estimated at 650 yards. (Edwards). A narrow street of stone, it was probably surrounded by markets in Jesus' time. He was led through the crowded streets carrying the crossbar of the cross (called a patibulum) across His shoulders. The crossbar probably weighed between 80 to 110 pounds. He was surrounded by a guard of Roman soldiers, one of which carried a titulus, a sign which announced His crime of

being "*the King of the Jews*" in Hebrew, Latin and Greek. On the way, He was unable to carry the cross. Some theorize that he may have fallen while going down the steps of the Antonio Fortress. A fall with the heavy patibulum on His back may have led to a contusion of the heart, predisposing His heart to rupture on the cross. (Ball) Simon of Cyrene (currently North Africa (Tripoli)), who apparently was affected by these events, was summoned to help.

The present Via Dolorosa was marked in the 16th century as the route over which Christ was led to His crucifixion (Magi). As is the location of Calvary, the true location of the Via Dolorosa is disputed. Much tradition as to what happened to Jesus is encountered on the Via Dolorosa today. There are 14 stations of 'events' that occurred and 9 churches on the way today. The stations of the cross were established in the 1800's (Magi). Today, there is one section of the path where one can walk on the stones which were used during Jesus time.

[Continue to Part 2](#)