

Bulls of Bashan Picture the Agony of Imputed Sin, Ps 22:12-13; Prophecy of the Crucifixion, vv. 14-16: Davis's Medical Account; the Gawkers & the Gamblers, vv. 17-18

- 20) The enormity of the opposition against the Lord is compared to being charged by the bulls of Bashan \bā'-shan\:

Psalm 22:12 - Many bulls have surrounded Me; strong bulls of Bashan have encircled Me.

Psalm 22:13 - They tear Me to pieces with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion.

- 21) The "bulls of Bashan" is a metaphor for a wide variety of ravenous enemies. A description of these bulls and their location at Bashan is provided by:

VanGemen, William A. "Psalms." In *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*. General editor, Frank E. Gaebelein. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 5:204-205:

12-13 The strength and ferocity of the enemies compares to that of the "bulls of Bashan" (v. 12) and to "roaring lions" (v. 13). The bulls of Bashan were proverbial for their size because they were well fed on the lush vegetation of the Bashan. Bashan is the region known today as the Golan Heights, located north of the Yarmuk \yār-mūk\ [River], east of the Sea of Galilee, and to the south of the Hermon Range. Its elevation is about two thousand feet above sea level, and it receives an average rain of over twenty-four inches per year. Its productiveness in meat, wheat, and oats, largely due to its regular precipitation, led to Bashan's becoming symbolic of human pride. The enemies in their self-reliance are compared to the bulls raised on the Bashan plateau.

- 22) David speaks of his enemies, the Amalekites, who had sacked the city of Ziklag with fire and captured its entire population (1 Samuel 30:1-2). The Amalekites were sure to seek retribution for David's attack on them when he killed everyone, women and children included, in 1 Samuel 27:8-9.
- 23) Prophetically the passage speaks of our Lord Who, when on the cross was surrounded by His enemies, the worst of which were our sins being imputed to Him and their judgment.
- 24) David's prophecy uses the tearing of flesh by the horns of Bashan's mighty bulls to illustrate the metaphorical tearing of flesh when Christ bore our sins in His own body on the cross, a prophecy confirmed as fulfilled by Peter in:

1 Peter 2:24 - He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross ...

- 25) Our sins being judged in Christ are further illustrated in Psalm 22:13 as ravening lions whose teeth tear into the flesh. It was this experience that motivated the Lord's shout in Matthew 27:46, "ἦλὶ ἦλὶ λεμὰ σαβαχθάνι, *Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?*": "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"
- 26) The next few verses provide a series of prophecies that describe the physical impact of crucifixion upon the body of Christ.

Psalm 22:14 - I am poured out like water and all My bones are pulling apart. My heart is like wax; it is melted within Me.

v. 15 - My strength is dried up like a broken vessel, and My tongue cleaves to the roof of my mouth; You have laid Me in the dust of death.

- 27) These two verses describe the physical agony endured by the Lord while He was concentrating on paying for our sins. The physical effects of crucifixion are grotesque and the medical analysis of them, although unnerving, provide insight into the fulfillment of these prophecies found in the Gospels.
- 28) One of the most widely quoted articles that analyzes the crucifixion from a medical perspective, was written in March 1965 by C. Truman Davis, M.D. (University of Tennessee College of Medicine). Excerpts from his paper provide details that help us understand the trauma experienced by the Lord on the cross:

Davis, C. Truman. "The Medical Account of Christ's Last Days and the Cross." *Arizona Medicine* 22, no. 3 (March 1965):

Golgotha

The heavy *patibulum* [the crossbeam] of the cross was tied across His shoulders. The procession of the condemned Christ, two thieves, and the execution detail of Roman soldiers headed by a centurion began its slow journey along the route which we know today as the *Via Dolorosa*.

In spite of Jesus' efforts to walk erect, the weight of the heavy wooden beam, together with the shock produced by copious loss of blood, was too much. He stumbled and fell. The rough wood of the beam gouged into the lacerated skin and muscles of the shoulders. He tried to rise, but human muscles had been pushed beyond their endurance. The centurion, anxious to proceed with the crucifixion, selected a stalwart North African onlooker, Simon of Cyrene \cī-rē'-ne\, to carry the cross. Jesus followed, still bleeding and sweating the cold, clammy sweat of shock. The 650-yard journey from the Fortress Antonia to Golgotha was finally completed. The prisoner was again stripped of His clothing except for a loin cloth which was allowed the Jews.

The crucifixion began. Jesus was offered wine mixed with myrrh, a mild analgesic, pain-relieving mixture. He refused the drink. Simon was ordered to place the *patibulum* on the ground, and Jesus was quickly thrown backward, with His shoulders against the wood. The legionnaire felt for the depression at the front of the wrist. He drove a heavy, square wrought-iron nail through the wrist and deep into the wood. Quickly, he moved to the other side and repeated the action, being careful not to pull the arms too tightly, but to allow some flexion and movement. The *patibulum* was then lifted into place at the top of the *stipes* [the vertical post], and the *titulus* [an inscription] reading "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" was nailed into place.

The left foot was pressed backward against the right foot. With both feet extended, toes down, a nail was driven through the arch of each, leaving the knees moderately flexed. The victim was now crucified.

On the Cross

As Jesus slowly sagged down with more weight on the nails in the wrists, excruciating, fiery pain shot along the fingers and up the arms to explode in the brain. The nails in the wrists were putting pressure on the median nerve, large nerve trunks which traverse the mid-wrist and hand. As He pushed himself upward to avoid this stretching torment, He placed His full weight on the nail through His feet. Again there was searing agony as the nail tore through the nerves between the metatarsal bones of His feet.

At this point, another phenomenon occurred. As the arms fatigued, great waves of cramps swept over the muscles, knotting them in deep relentless, throbbing pain. With these cramps came the inability to push Himself upward. Hanging by the arm, the pectoral muscles, the large muscles of the chest, were paralyzed and the intercostal muscles, the small muscles between the ribs, were unable to act.

Air could be drawn into the lungs, but could not be exhaled. Jesus fought to raise Himself in order to get even one short breath. Finally, the carbon dioxide level increased in the lungs and in the blood stream, and the cramps partially subsided.

The Last Words

Spasmodically, He was able to push Himself upward to exhale and bring in life-giving oxygen. It was undoubtedly during these periods that He uttered the seven short sentences that are recorded.

The first - looking down at the Roman soldiers throwing dice for His seamless garment: "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do."

The second - to the penitent thief: "Today, thou shalt be with me in Paradise."

The third - looking down at Mary His mother, He said: "Woman, behold your son." Then turning to the terrified, grief-stricken adolescent John, the beloved apostle, He said: "Behold your mother."

The fourth cry is from the beginning of Psalm 22: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

He suffered hours of limitless pain, cycles of twisting, joint-rending cramps, intermittent partial asphyxiation, and searing pain as tissue was torn from His lacerated back from His movement up and down against the rough timbers of the cross. Then another agony began: a deep crushing pain in the chest as the pericardium, the sac surrounding the heart, slowly filled with serum and began to compress the heart.

The prophecy in Psalm 22:14 was being fulfilled: "I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint, my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels."

The end was rapidly approaching. The loss of tissue fluids had reached a critical level; the compressed heart was struggling to pump heavy, thick, sluggish blood to the tissues, and the tortured lungs were making a frantic effort to inhale small gulps of air. The markedly dehydrated tissues sent their flood of stimuli to the brain. Jesus gasped His fifth cry: "I thirst." Again we read in the prophetic psalm: "My strength is dried up like a potsherd; my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death" (Psalm 22:15 KJV).

A sponge soaked in *posca* [ὄξος, *oxos*], the cheap, sour wine that was the staple drink of the Roman legionnaires, was lifted to Jesus' lips. His body was now in *extremis* [L: "at the end"], and He could feel the chill of death creeping through His tissues. This realization brought forth His sixth word, possibly little more than a tortured whisper: "It is finished." His mission of atonement had been completed. Finally, He could allow His body to die. With one last surge of strength, He once again pressed His torn feet against the nail, straightened His legs, took a deeper breath, and uttered His seventh and last cry: "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit."

Death

The common method of ending a crucifixion was by crurifracture, the breaking of the bones of the leg [L: *crura fracta*: **Death was sometimes hastened by breaking the legs of the victims (ISBE, 2:762)**]. This prevented the victim from pushing himself upward; the tension could not be relieved from the muscles of the chest, and rapid suffocation occurred. The legs of the two thieves were broken, but when the soldiers approached Jesus, they saw that this was unnecessary.

Apparently, to make doubly sure of death, the legionnaire drove his lance between the ribs, upward through the pericardium and into the heart. John 19:34 states, "And immediately there came out blood and water." Thus there was an escape of watery fluid from the sac surrounding the heart and the blood of the interior of the heart. This is rather conclusive post-mortem evidence that Jesus died, not the usual crucifixion death by suffocation, but of heart failure due to shock and constriction of the heart by fluid in the pericardium.

- 29) The horrible details of the crucifixion amplify the prophecies of verses 14 and 15. The phrase in verse 14, "My heart is like wax; it is melted within Me" is described thusly by Davis:

The loss of tissue fluids had reached a critical level; the compressed heart was struggling to pump heavy, thick, sluggish blood to the tissues, and the tortured lungs were making a frantic effort to inhale small gulps of air. The markedly dehydrated tissues sent their flood of stimuli to the brain.

- 30) This ordeal led to physical exhaustion, extreme thirst, and impending death. Davis analyzes verse 15's prophecy:

The markedly dehydrated tissues sent their flood of stimuli to the brain. Jesus gasped His fifth cry: "I thirst."

- 31) Davis quotes from:

John 19:28 - Jesus, knowing that all things had already been accomplished, to fulfill the Scripture, said, "I thirst."

- 32) The phrase in Psalm 22:15, "You lay Me in the dust of death," is the Lord's acknowledgement that He is approaching physical death yet knowing He had accomplished Operation Reconciliation He was free to ask for water.
- 33) In verse 16 David describes the manner by which the Messiah was to be executed, a clear prophecy of the crucifixion, a type of punishment unknown in the tenth century BC.

Psalm 22:16 - For dogs [Gentiles, primarily Roman soldiers] have surrounded Me. The assembly of the wicked [the Jewish religious leadership and those who followed them] have encircled Me. They have pierced My hands and My feet [crucifixion].

- 34) The fulfillment of the prophecy of Roman soldiers surrounding the Lord is found in:

Matthew 27:36 - Sitting down, they [the Roman soldiers] began to keep watch over Him there [on Golgotha].

- 35) Later Matthew comments on the Jews gathering around to view Jesus crucified:

Matthew 27:39 - Those passing by were hurling abuse at Him, wagging their heads.

v. 40 - and saying, "You who are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross."

v. 41 - In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking Him and saying,

v. 42 - "He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe in Him."

- 36) The statement, “They have pierced My hands and feet,” can only be fulfilled by the act of crucifixion, fulfilled in:

Matthew 27:22 - Pilate said to them [**chief priests and elders**], “What shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?” They all said, “Crucify Him!”

v. 26 - Then he [**Pilate**] released Barrabas for them; but after having Jesus scourged, he handed Him over to be crucified.

Matthew 27:33 - When they [**the Roman soldiers**] came to a place called Golgotha, which means Place of a Skull,

v. 34 - they gave Him wine to drink, mixed with gall; and after tasting it, He was unwilling to drink.

v. 35 - And when they had crucified Him, they divided up His garments among themselves by casting lots.

- 37) The words “crucify” and “crucified” in these verses are the Greek noun **σταυρός, *stauros***, and verb **σταυρόω, *stauroō***. They refer to the device and the act respectively.
- 38) The *stauros* is the vertical post, referred to by Davis with the Latin word *stipes*. The crosspiece was called in the Latin, *patibulum*. In the New Testament these specifics are not recognized and the word *stauros* is consistently translated “cross” while the verb form, *stauroō*, is always used for the act of crucifixion.

- 39) The next verse describes the physical effects of being crucified:

Psalms 22:17 - I can count all My bones. They [**all who observe Him**] keep looking [**נָבַח *navath***] at Me and staring [**רָאָה *ra'a***] at Me.

- 40) Crucifixion causes the body to be stretched to such a degree that the bones are exposed in a ghastly manner thus attracting the lurid attention of those gathered around.
- 41) Those so gathered have already been observed. Here David describes a couple of mannerisms that reveal not only their rejection of Jesus as the Christ and but also the opinion that He is deserving of His treatment.
- 41) *Navath* refers to one’s visual perception, from the casual glance to studied and sustained evaluation. Some keep glancing up at him while others stare in bemusement.
- 42) The word *ra'a* in this context means “to gawk” much like those who bottleneck freeways by rubbernecking at fender benders. A brief analysis of the word is provided by:

Botterweck, G. Johannes, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry (eds.). *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. Translated by David E. Green. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004), 13:221:

Not rarely the sight of misfortune has an aura of sensationalism that evokes gawking. In Judges 16:24 the people [**the Philistines**] gawk at Samson as he is led before them. In 2 Samuel 20:12 the people stand in the street to gawk at the body of Amasa *lam'a-sal* [**assassinated by Joab**]. In Psalm 22:18 (17) the psalmist complains of being surrounded by a gawking rabble who gloat over his suffering.

- 43) The idea of staring and gawking is brought out in the Gospels, specifically in Matthew 27:39-44, Mark 15:29-32, and Luke 23:35-38.
- 44) The Roman soldiers fulfill the prophecy of the next verse when they gambled for the Lord's clothes.

Psalm 22:18 - They divide My garments among them, and gamble for My clothes.

- 45) This prophecy is covered by three of the Gospel writers:

Matthew 27:35 - When they [the Roman soldiers] had crucified Him, they divided up His garments among themselves by casting lots.

- 46) A lot was a piece of wood or stone with an individual's name on it. Casting lots was done to determine who would win a particle of the Lord's clothing. The person whose piece was the first to fall out of a shaken container was considered the winner.
- 47) This event is also mentioned in Luke 23:34 and John 19:23-24.