

620 Did Jesus Really Die?

Phil Sanders

God's Answers to Life's Questions

A recent book and movie suggests that Jesus didn't really die or be raised from the dead but married Mary Magdalene and moved to the southern shores of France. Well, what does the Bible say? Stay tuned, and we'll find out.

The news media and a lot of people have been stirred up by a recent book that suggests that Jesus did not really rise from the dead because He did not really die. He rigged the crucifixion and only pretended to die. They claim that they have documented proof that Jesus was alive in 45 AD in France, and that he and Mary Magdalene were the parents of a daughter, from whom a line of kings arose. This is the beginning of a two-part study on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In this lesson we're going to examine the evidence for the death of Jesus Christ.

A recent book suggests that Jesus rigged his own crucifixion with Pilate and others. When they took Him down from the cross, he was really still alive. They say that when Jesus drank from the sponge which was filled with sour wine and gall, there was also a drug which knocked him out. They say he fainted on the cross and then was revived by Mary Magdalene in the tomb at night. Of course, they suggest the preaching that Jesus died on the cross is the biggest con game that ever happened in the history of the world. Most of their information comes from documents that arose from heretical groups in the second and third century and deny the widely recognized teaching of the four gospel accounts.

We're going to re-examine the evidence of the Scriptures to see what really happened on that Friday so many years ago. We believe the evidence will speak for itself. When Jesus was taken prisoner from Gethsemane that night to be tried, he endured numerous beatings. Matthew 26:67-68 tells us what happened before daylight at the home of Caiaphas, "Then they spat in His face and beat Him with their fists; and others slapped Him, and said, 'Prophecy to us, You Christ; who is the one who hit You?'" The next morning Jesus appeared before Pilate, who sentenced him to be scourged and then to be crucified. Scourging was a terrible beating and often caused the death of an individual.

Scourging was a severe form of corporal punishment involving whipping and beating, usually was done with the victim tied to a post or bench and administered by a soldier. The Jewish law said in Deuteronomy 25:3 that a criminal could only receive 40 stripes. In later years this was reduced to 39. Thirteen would go to the chest and 26 to the back. In the case of Jesus, it was the Romans not the Jews who scourged Jesus. They used a whip called a flagrum. Horace calls it *horribile flagellum*. It consisted of a handle, to which several cords or leather thongs were affixed, which were weighted with jagged pieces of bone or metal, to make the blow more painful and effective.

The victim was tied to a post (Acts 22:25) and the blows were applied to the several places on the body in addition to the back. The bone and glass and metal would sink into the flesh with each blow and painfully tear the skin to pieces. Often the veins, muscles, and sinews would be opened to exposure. In the tense position of the body, the effect can easily be imagined. So hideous was the punishment that the victim usually fainted and often died under it. The punishment also caused significant blood loss. So dreadful was it that it was illegal to scourge a Roman citizen. The scourging itself was thought of a death before death. It was extremely painful and humiliating.

Matthew 27:27-31 says, "Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole *Roman* cohort around Him. They stripped Him and put a scarlet robe on Him. And after twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on His head, and

a reed in His right hand; and they knelt down before Him and mocked Him, saying, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' They spat on Him, and took the reed and *began* to beat Him on the head. After they had mocked Him, they took the *scarlet* robe off Him and put His *own* garments back on Him, and led Him away to crucify Him." Can you imagine the pain of changing clothes after a scourging or wearing a crown of thorns.

It was normal for a man being crucified to carry his own cross to the place of execution. John 19:17 says, "They took Jesus, therefore, and He went out, bearing His own cross, to the place called the Place of a Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha." But it appears that, following his flogging, Jesus was already in such a weakened state that he couldn't carry it all the way. Mark 15:21 says, "they pressed into service a passer-by coming from the country, Simon of Cyrene (the father of Alexander and Rufus), to bear His cross." Verse 22 says they brought (or carried) him to the place Golgotha. So weakened was Jesus that they had to help carry him to the place where he was crucified.

The Scriptures are remarkably brief about the pain of crucifixion. The only statement from the lips of Jesus about his suffering was, "I thirst." Yet, those who have studied crucifixion know of its extreme torment and pain. So horrible was it that Cicero said, "Even the mere word, cross, must remain far not only from the lips of the citizens of Rome, but also from their thoughts, their eyes, their ears." They crucified Jesus by nailing his hands and feet to a cross and suspending him upright for all to see. Death by crucifixion included all that pain can bring: dizziness, cramp, thirst, starvation, sleeplessness, fever, tetanus, and suffocation. Beyond all this was the public shame of the taunting.

Crucifixion was designed to torment a person to death by hanging them in a position that would not allow them to breathe easily. With their arms high they would have to pull up with their nailed hands and push up with their nailed feet to allow a breath. So painful and so demanding of strength was it to pull up and breathe that they quickly sank back down, only to find that they had to pull up again and again to stay alive. The pain and the pressure eventually exhausted the poor victim of crucifixion until he could no longer pull up to catch his breath. Crucifixion brought a man to the very point of suffering and death and left him there to suffer as long as possible. It was cruel beyond imagination.

The unnatural position of the body on the cross made every movement agonizing. Jesus spent six very long hours on the cross. The lacerated veins and exposed back to the wood made it so that all a victim could want was release in death. Jesus did ultimately breathe his last breath, and his final words were, "Father, into your hands, I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46). The Roman soldiers were not naïve. They knew when a person was dead. The idea that Jesus merely fainted on the cross would not have been enough. If Jesus had fainted, he would not have been able to breathe, since he would have remained slumped with his arms high above his head cutting off the oxygen.

John said in John 19:31-34, "Then the Jews, because it was the day of preparation, so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and *that* they might be taken away. So the soldiers came, and broke the legs of the first man and of the other who was crucified with Him; but coming to Jesus, when they 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.” If the crucifixion did not kill Jesus surely this spear in his did kill him. The Roman soldier made sure he was dead.

William Edwards, a medical doctor, had this to say about this wound: “Clearly the weight of historical 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 the 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.” Clearly, Jesus died on the cross even before the spear pierced his side. There is no fakery here. These Romans knew death and meant to kill Jesus on the cross.

John said that blood and water came forth from the wound of the spear. He apparently attached great importance to the fact that both blood and water came forth. Had Jesus been alive when the soldier inflicted the wound, there would have been strong spurts of blood with every heart beat. Instead you have blood and water coming out, which is strong medical proof that Jesus was already dead. John was no medical pathologist, but he was an eye-witness of what he saw. The soldier thrust this spear even though he believed Jesus to be dead. He didn’t want to take any chances of being blamed if for some reason Jesus actually survived the cross, so he stabbed with the spear.

Mark 15:43-45 says, “Joseph of Arimathea ... gathered up courage and went in before Pilate, and asked for the body of Jesus. Pilate wondered if He was dead by this time, and summoning the centurion, he questioned him as to whether He was already dead. And ascertaining this from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph.” Pilate was not going to release Jesus’ body until he himself had been assured that Jesus was dead. He didn’t ask one of the soldiers, he asked the centurion. He wanted verification. The only conspiracy here is to make sure Jesus was truly dead, not that he would escape death. Pilate only released the body after he knew for sure.

None of those who took down the body and laid it in the grave had any doubt that Jesus was dead. The weeping women, the frightened disciples, and the hardened Roman soldiers all believed that Jesus was dead. The spear was to make sure, and Pilate double-checked. Joseph and Nicodemus purchased 75 pounds of myrrh and aloe with linens to wrap up the body of Jesus. Why would they have secured a tomb and purchased these expensive spices if there were any doubt his death? Had there been any remaining life in him when they took him from the cross, the wrapping of his body in the spices and linens would surely have removed any doubt.

The burial customs of the day meant that the body of Jesus would be wrapped with linen strips with the spices between the wrappings. One hundred Roman pounds was equivalent to our 75 pounds and was very extravagant. The myrrh and aloe spices were resinous and would cause the strips of linen to seal, keeping everything out. Now if the body were sealed this way, it would have been impossible for Jesus to breathe. If He by some small chance were alive in the tomb, the burial customs would have killed him. He could not have lived after they wrapped him in the linens, sealed by the spices. By the way, the linen wrappings remained in the tomb, even after the body of Jesus was raised.

Interestingly, those who think Jesus did not die say that Joseph asked for the “body” (soma) of Jesus. They argue that the word (soma) only speaks of a living body. The word (ptoma) speaks of a corpse. If they had wanted the dead body of Jesus they would have used ptoma not soma. But in Acts 9:37 and 40 Luke uses the word soma to speak of the dead body of Dorcas. So soma can be used to speak of the dead body of Jesus. People who make arguments like this may be able to fool some people, but they are the real deceivers, not the Bible. They quote the Bible when they think it supports them, and then they speak against it when it differs with them. This is a hypocritical way to use the Bible.

The death of Jesus was God’s will. Jesus is the “Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world” (John 1:29). He is called a lamb, because a lamb is a sin offering. For the lamb to be offered, it must die. John 3:16 says, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.” Jesus was willing to die for us to redeem us from every lawless deed by His precious blood. There is no first century proof Jesus faked death and moved to France with Mary Magdalene. This is an old heresy brought back to life by people who have already rejected Jesus. They are the ones who are trying to “con” us, not Jesus.

My friend, Jesus loved you enough to die for you. I hope you will love Him enough to live for Him and serve Him all your days. Believe in the Lord Jesus, repent of your sins, confess that He is the Christ, the son of the living God, and be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins. In baptism you are crucified with Christ so that the old man of sin will be done away with, and you are raised with Him to walk in newness of life. I hope you won’t lose another day to sin and the world and will come to Jesus today to start a new life.

No conspiracy theory has ever explained how Jesus could have survived this agonizing torture brought by men determined to kill him. How a man who has suffered so could be fit enough within three days to convince people that he was really the supernaturally resurrected Son of God is indeed a mystery. Why would Jesus be willing to endure such tortures to perpetuate a lie? Why would he then vanish without trace within a few weeks? Would it not have been easier for him to have simply slipped out of town before he was arrested? Why would Jesus deceive us? Is it in His character to deceive? To fool us all? This is the same Jesus who did not speak up for himself in his own defense. Why would He lie?

Jesus did not lie. He loved us enough to die for our sins so that we might live with Him forever. He had a reason to go to the cross. Those who think that the gospel is just a big hoax do not tell us how Jesus benefited from the lie. They cannot tell us why he “conned” us or what benefit he got from this “con game.” But if Jesus really did die and resurrect, we can give a lengthy list of benefits from his death and resurrection. Which makes sense? The four gospels give us eye-witness testimony, while the second and third century fabrications give someone’s imagination and speculation. I don’t know about you, but I believe the Word of God found in the writings of the New Testament!!!!

*Copyright 2005, Phil Sanders
Concord Road Church of Christ
8221 Concord Rd., Brentwood, TN 37027
1-877-226-5747*

phil@God-answers.org

www.tv.God-answers.org