



have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father (John 10:17-18, KJV).

Wilkinson writes, “We believe...that the view which most satisfactorily explains our Lord’s death is that he voluntarily surrendered his life on the cross before the usual physical causes of death in crucifixion could operate. He did not die from some inevitable physical necessity or pathological process” (107). We must not allow the consideration of science and medicine to blind us to who Jesus truly was. He was God in the flesh, laying down his life for man by His own choice!

Augustine, commenting on Jesus’ declaration, “**It is finished,**” wrote that Jesus said this “as if he had been waiting for this, like one, indeed, who dies when he willed it to be so” (*Harmony of the Gospels* 3.18). He wrote further, “He came to the death of the flesh, because

he did not leave it against his will, but because he willed, when he willed, as he willed” (*On the Trinity* 4.13 {16}). Amen! Why did Jesus do this? Out of love for a lost and dying world. Brother Sewell Hall is correct, “Above all other things, the cross provides the strongest evidence of God’s love. The man on the cross is the very Son whom God loved so much that He desired other sons ‘conformed to His image, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren’ (Rom. 8:29)” (“The Cross,” 23).

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Faithful Sayings

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Services

Sunday: 9:30 AM
10:20 AM
6:00 PM
Wednesday: 7:00 PM

Elders:

Pat Ledbetter
Jeff Nunn
Kyle Pope

Deacons:

Dean Bowers
Eddie Cook
Steve Dixon
Jack Langley
Neil Ledbetter
Brady McAlister
Walker McAnear
Lance Purcell
Rusty Scott

Evangelist:

Kyle Pope



The Crucifixion of Jesus (2)

By Kyle Pope

In the previous article we examined what we can know about the ancient practice of crucifixion in order to better understand what Jesus experienced for us, as recorded in the simple biblical statement “**then they crucified Him**” (Matt. 27:35a, NKJV). In this article we will conclude our study by examining what we know about death by crucifixion in general.

The Cause of Jesus’ Death

Since the mid-twentieth century, with the publication of *A Doctor at Calvary* by French surgeon Pierre Barbet, many commentators have explained Jesus’ death as the result of *asphyxia*. According to Barbet’s theory, built upon the earlier work of his predecessor Dr. A. LaBec, a victim suspended on a cross suffered intense constriction of the rib cage compressing the lungs. Barbet argued that when exhaustion (or the breaking of legs) took place, the victim could no longer push himself up allowing the lungs to expand, resulting in a sustained inhalation ultimately depriving the victim of oxygen (74-80). Barbet cited eyewitness accounts of European prisoners of war suspended by their wrists with their feet weighted dying within six to ten minutes from asphyxia, due to the inability to exhale (76, 174). Barbet also challenged the view that a victim of crucifixion would be nailed through the palm of the hands. He argued that the weight of a suspended body would tear through the palms where the nail had been driven into the cross (92-105). This led to numerous theories that argued that the arms would have been nailed through the wrist or even the forearm in crucifixion.

Within recent years Barbet's theory has been seriously challenged by Dr. Fredrick Zugibe. In his book, *The Crucifixion of Jesus: A Forensic Study*, Zugibe tested the effects of suspension on a cross within a laboratory and found that with arms extended the effects on respiration were not as pronounced as Barbet theorized (101-122). Zugibe argued instead, that the effects of severe scourging, followed by crucifixion would produce two conditions known as *hypovolemic* and *traumatic shock*, ultimately resulting in cardiac arrest. Zugibe explains *hypovolemic shock* as resulting from "a significant fall in the blood volume due to hemor-

rhage or a loss of body fluids" and *traumatic shock* as "resulting from a serious injury" sometimes associated with "severe pain" (130-131). This is not necessarily external blood loss, but internal hemorrhaging.

The Breaking of Legs

One of the strengths of Barbet's theory was that it appeared to explain the practice of *crurifragium* (breaking the legs of the victim). We noted in the previous article that this was generally considered the third and final stage of Roman crucifixion. The gospel of John clearly records the breaking of a victim's legs as a means of hastening death (John 19:31-33). Barbet argued that the reason the legs were broken was to hasten asphyxiation (Barbet, 78). His theory, however, failed to acknowledge the use of the *sedile* (or seat) commonly used on some crosses, and said to have been present on the cross of Christ according to church writers in the second century (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 2.24.4; Tertullian, *Ad Nationes* 1.12; *Contra Marcian* 3.18).^{*} Wilkinson explains, "If this were present then the arms would not pull on the ribs to the same degree as if it were absent, and the chest would not be kept in a position" that impaired breathing in the same way (106).

If a *sedile* was used, why would a victim's legs be broken? Zugibe argues that the fracture of a single thigh bone results in internal blood loss of two liters. This would not only accelerate hypovolemic and traumatic shock, but would be a final "*coup de grace* blow to hasten death" (106). If the *sedile* was used, it would also take some of the weight off of the hands. Zugibe, argues from studies he has done on the hands of wound victims, that the upper palm, just under the thumb is "very strong and anatomically sound" and would be capable of supporting the body (78). It has been argued that the Aramaic word for "hand" could refer to the wrist as well as the hand properly (Sava, "The Wounds of Christ," 441). It is true that even in modern Hebrew the wrist is called "the joint of the hand." However, since the crucified remains from Giv'at ha-Mivtar are

^{*} Barbet cited the testimony of early church writers and even Seneca regarding the use of the *sedile* (45), and even acknowledged the problems that its use would pose to his theory (78), but even so he did not believe that it was used in the case of Christ's crucifixion (100-101).



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no longer believed to support the idea of a nail through the forearm (Zias and Charlesworth, 280), and one of the earliest depictions of Christ on the cross, from a fifth century ivory casket now housed in the British Museum show nails through the palms, there seems little reason to even consider a broader definition of "hands" (cf. Luke 24:39; John 20:27).

Piercing Jesus' Side

Jesus' legs were not broken, as Scripture had prophesied (cf. Num. 9:12; John 19:33-36), when His side was pierced and it was determined that He was already dead. Why did "blood and water" flow from His side? Why did this indicate that He was dead? A common explanation is that the spear pierced Jesus' heart and the pericardial sac surrounding the heart. Medical doctor Anthony Sava, rejects this conclusion as a result of his own experiments on cadavers within six hours after death. He found that no such clear separation of blood and water resulted from this type of wound ("The Wound in the Side of Christ," 344). He argues instead, that trauma caused by scourging could have led to conditions which have been observed. He explains:

...Non-penetrating injuries of the chest are capable of producing an accumulation of hemorrhagic fluid in the space between the ribs and the lung....Such collections of blood in closed cavities do not clot. The red blood cells tend by their weight to gravitate toward the bottom of the containing cavity, thus dividing it into a dark red cellular component below, while the lighter clear serum accumulates in the upper half of the collection as a separate although contiguous layer...the settling by this fluid into layers and its ultimate evacuation by opening the chest below the level of separation must inevitably result in the "immediate" flow of blood followed by the water (*Ibid.*, 345).

"Sent Away the Spirit"

Scripture records that when Jesus died, He "**cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit**" (Matt. 27:50, NKJV). John and Luke seem to record what He "**cried out.**" John records that He said the simple words, "**It is finished**" (John 19:30). Luke records His cry, "**Father, into thy hands I com-**

mend my spirit" (Luke 23:46, KJV). After these words Jesus "**yielded up His spirit**" or literally from the Greek "sent away the spirit." The other gospels record, "**he breathed out His life**" (Mark 15:37) and "**He gave up the spirit**" (John 19:30), which Vincent suggests, "seems to imply a *voluntary* yielding up of his life" (145). In some of the earliest texts that addressed the cause of Jesus' death, the voluntary choice on the part of Christ to release His spirit at His will was the accepted explanation. Tertullian wrote, "At his own free-will, he with a word dismissed from him his spirit" (*Apolo-*

gy 21). We can certainly appreciate some of the medical theories above that offer explanations for the physical and biological factors involved in crucifixion. Perhaps some or all of these factors played a role. Even so, we must not discount the fact that in Jesus we are not talking about One who could simply be *overtaken* by death. Jesus declared:

Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I