

How Dead Was Jesus?

Scripture Reading:

- Matt 27:62-66 Now on the next day, which is {the one} after the preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered together with Pilate, 63 and said, "Sir, we remember that when He was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I {am to} rise again.' 64 "Therefore, give orders for the grave to be made secure until the third day, lest the disciples come and steal Him away and say to the people, 'He has risen from the dead,' and the last deception will be worse than the first." 65 Pilate said to them, "You have a guard; go, make it {as} secure as you know how." 66 And they went and made the grave secure, and along with the guard they set a seal on the stone.

How dead was Jesus? There are theories out there that the Jesus-hating world is floating that propose that Jesus really did not die on the cross. For example it says in the *Qur'an 4:155*: "*and for their unbelief, and their uttering against Mary a mighty calumny, and for their saying, 'We slew the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, the Messenger of God' -- yet they did not slay him, neither crucified him, only a likeness of that was shown to them*". The Muslims propose that Jesus really did not die, but only appeared to die. This morning's lesson is a reality check of the scriptures to confirm this. How dead was Jesus?

1) He was "Spear in the Side" Dead

John 19:31-37 The Jews therefore, because it was the day of preparation, so that the bodies should 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. 32 The soldiers therefore came, and broke the legs of the first man, and of the other man who was crucified with Him; 33 but coming to Jesus, when they saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs; 34 but one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately there came out blood and water. 35 And he who has seen has borne witness, and his witness is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you also may believe. 36 For these things came to pass, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, "Not a bone of Him shall be broken." 37 And again another Scripture says, "They shall look on Him whom they pierced."

- It was the normal practice of the Romans to leave a corpse on the cross until vermin would consume them. They did this in an effort to deter against rebellion in the future.
- *Deut 21:22-23 "And if a man has committed a sin worthy of death, and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, 23 his corpse shall not hang all night on the tree, but you shall surely bury him on the same day (for he who is hanged is accursed of God), so that you do not defile your land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance."*
- Since the holy day of Passover was upon them, it would surely cause a riot to see bodies hanging out before the public. Therefore they sent a

- Jewish delegation to put a little PC pressure on Pilate to hasten the deaths and take the victims down for burial.
- The means that they sped up the process of dying was to break their legs, called *crurifragium*. This was carried out by one of the four soldiers by bashing their shins with a heavy iron mallet. The pain would be so severe, causing the victim to be unable to support themselves with their legs and they would die in a matter of minutes. Since Jesus was already dead, this would not apply. This was significant because it was prophesied that Jesus would not have His legs like the others, for He is our Passover.
 - Ps 34:20 He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken.
 - Exod 12:46 "It is to be eaten in a single house; you are not to bring forth any of the flesh outside of the house, nor are you to break any bone of it.
 - In order to confirm the death of Jesus, one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear. *Isa 53:5 "...He was pierced through..."* From the angle of the body on the cross, the spear probably entered in just below the ribcage and piercing through the heart and both lungs. From out of this puncture poured water and blood. This confirmed He was dead, for when a stressed heart of one being crucified ruptures, the lungs will fill up with water and blood from the pericardium. This would have been typical of a person suffering through crucifixion. Jesus was "Blood and Water" dead as confirmed in the puncturing of his lungs and heart.
 - By the way, it was also prophesied that there would be mourning by the people over this confirming fact. *Zech 12:10 "And I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him, like the bitter weeping over a first-born."*
 - Interestingly I Jn 5:6 states "*This is the one who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ; not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood.*" He was identified as the Christ at His baptism by John and through his blood was proclaimed to be the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. He came by water and blood and He would leave by water and blood.
 - How dead was Jesus? He was declared dead by soldiers who executed people for a living. He was "Spear in the Side" dead, for the soldier confirmed it.

2) He was "Government-Confirmed" Dead

Mark 15:43-45 Joseph of Arimathea came, a prominent member of the Council, who himself was waiting for the kingdom of God; and he gathered up courage and went in before Pilate, and asked for the body of Jesus. 44 And Pilate wondered if He was dead by this time, and summoning the centurion, he questioned him as to whether He was already dead. 45 And ascertaining this from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph.

- Introduce a man named Joseph of Arimathea. He was a member of the Sanhedrin and a secret disciple of Jesus (John 19:38). He apparently did not approve of the dishonest trial and sentencing of Jesus, but was outnumbered by the many others on the high court. At a time that the other Jewish leaders were probably beginning their preparation for the Passover, Joseph mustered up the courage to request the body of Jesus for a decent burial.
- Pilate wondered if Jesus was really dead because usually six hours was not enough to kill a man on the cross. After summoning the centurion for inquiry, it was officially confirmed that He was dead. He approved the body of Jesus to be released to Joseph. Jesus was “Pilate-approved” dead.
- This also confirms to us that Pilate still did not believe that Jesus was guilty, for it was protocol to simply throw the bodies of villains into a mass grave. When Pilate gives permission to have a decent burial, it is quite a gesture on his behalf. Jesus was so dead that it was “Government-confirmed”, receiving official recognition by the Roman governor.

3) He was “Preparation of the Body” Dead

John 19:38-40 And after these things Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but a secret {one,} for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate granted permission. He came therefore, and took away His body. 39 And Nicodemus came also, who had first come to Him by night; bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds {weight} 40 And so they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in linen wrappings with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews.

- It is in the John account that we find a second member of the Sanhedrin that was very sympathetic to Jesus; His name was Nicodemus. He was the leader that early on in Jesus’ ministry secretly came in the night to learn more from the Lord (John 3). He was also the Sanhedrin member that tried to add civility to the hostilities against Jesus in the Jews plot of John 7:50. Together with Joseph, they were released the body of Jesus and they began the preparation of His dead body.
- What we are reading is a body preparation. The normal means of Jewish preparation of the body for burial involved the following steps:
 - First was the cleansing of the body. In the case of Jesus, the body was in bad shape, for He was bloodied and dirty from the path that He took to the cross.
 - Second, they would wrap the body in clean linen. It was usually a big sheet that could go around the body a couple of times.
 - Third, they would use a paste made of Myrrh and aromatic spices to overcome the stench of decay. Seventy-five pounds would certainly be enough to do the job. They would dip strips of linen in the paste and stick it between the folds of the sheet. Because it was sticky the result would be a soft cocoon-like wrapping.

- It states in the KJV, ASV, NAS, RSV, NKJ and BBE that they used “one hundred pounds” of body preparation material, but the more modern NIV states “seventy-five pounds”. This contradiction with the other versions is because the foremost uses English pounds and latter uses Roman pounds. In other words, the NIV more accurately translates the word *litras* for just under 12 ounces, the Roman *litras*. On the other versions it simply calls it pounds (16 ounces) in the English. I tend to agree with the NIV in this case. It is not a contradiction, simply an attempt to more accurately interpret the Greek. Either way, it does not change the context of the body-preparation.
- If there was a time to notice that Jesus might not be dead, the preparation of the body for burial might be a good time to figure it out. How dead was Jesus? He was “Preparation of the Body” Dead.

4) He was “Graveyard” Dead

John 19:41-42 Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had yet been laid. 42 Therefore on account of the Jewish day of preparation, because the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

- Because 6 PM was closing in and the Sabbath was about to kick in, they needed to put Jesus in the tomb quickly. There was not a funeral procession, but a quick transport to a nearby tomb owned by Joseph. Apparently this tomb was an expensive one, being carved out of the limestone, just had been prophesied. *Isa 53:9 His grave was assigned with wicked men, yet He was with a rich man in His death, because He had done no violence, nor was there any deceit in His mouth.*
- Normally the Jews would lay the prepared body on a slab and leave it there for one year during the time of mourning. After the one year, they would remove the bones and place them into an ossuary and make room for the next death. In this way a tomb would become a family tomb. Once inside the tomb, they would roll a millstone across the front of the tomb entrance.
- During the first few days, there could be additional body preparation made. That seems to be the case of the women who had planned to come back after the Sabbath (Luke 23:55).
- The simple point is that Jesus was so dead that He was “Graveyard Dead”! In fact, He was so “Graveyard Dead” that the Jewish leaders went to Pilate on Saturday morning requesting to charge their own guards to seal and watch the tomb in case the apostles tried to steal the body Mathew 27:62-66. Jesus was so dead that He was “Graveyard Dead!”

Closing Story:

Years ago while in a small-group Bible study in a restaurant, we were emphasizing the importance of the gospel in our everyday lives. A young, self-proclaimed atheist, pre-med student named George was in the booth next to us.

He piped into our conversation, saying, “I believe the evidence proves the Swoon Theory concerning Jesus”. We introduced ourselves to him and inquired further concerning his embraced theory of swoon. He said it was likely that Jesus merely passed out on the cross, was placed in the tomb and revived from the coolness thereof. From there He simply crept out and traveled to a distant location to live out His life.

I told him that it was an interesting theory, to which he thanked me for hearing him out. After thinking about for a couple of minutes, I asked him the following question.

“George, I have thought about the evidence and have a question for you to consider.

- The apostles, who were there, said He was dead.
- The women followers of Jesus, whom stood by, said He was dead
- Governor Pilate, who released the body, said He was dead.
- The Sanhedrin members, who prepared His body, said He was dead.
- The soldier, who killed people for a living and pierced a spear through Jesus’ heart and lungs, said He was dead.
- The Chief Priest who went to Pilate said He was dead.
- The guards who watched over the tomb said He was dead.

All the eye-witnesses who were there said He was dead! What eye-witnesses are you quoting that say He was not dead?

He said that he was not any eye-witnesses to it, for it was only a theory. He admitted to me that it was not a good theory.

Conclusion:

How dead was Jesus? He was a dead as dead can be. He was dead all over like Rover!

1. He was “Spear in the Side” dead.
2. He was “Government-Confirmed” dead.
3. He was “Preparation of the Body” dead.
4. He was “Graveyard” dead.

If Jesus was not absolutely DEAD, then He cannot be absolutely ALIVE FOREVERMORE!